HOW TO LEVERAGE UNDERUTILIZED MUNICIPALITY-CONTROLLED REAL ESTATE TO CREATE VIBRANT COMMUNITIES

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▶ ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF INDIGENOUS LANDS AND TREATIES ACROSS CANADA

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▶ ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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PREFACE

Communities across Canada are rich in public assets of all kinds and sizes. These spaces are essential social and environmental infrastructure that can become a powerful lever towards building more sustainable communities for all. At their best, these physical spaces, part of the civic commons, foster greater livability, vibrancy, belonging and engagement. Positive outcomes range from stronger connection, wellbeing and community, to improved climate resilience, safety, inclusion and diversity. However, many issues remain regarding the use of public spaces, and improvements still need to be made. It can be challenging for communities to understand how to better tap into the potential of these spaces in ways that work for them.

The obstacles faced in creating and maintaining healthy public spaces include the need for new ways of thinking, problem-solving and implementation. Most importantly, it is key to acknowledge the roles that privilege and power hold in public spaces. The displacement and inequity that Indigenous populations face are common, as many Indigenous peoples in urban spaces live without homes and are usually not welcome in public spaces; an increase in initiatives and welcoming Indigenous groups to these areas has been pushed around Canada. The efforts of the _O:se kenhionhata:tie Land Back Camp is an example of how inclusive, vibrant public spaces could coexist with Indigenous views and needs_. Having these discussions about changing how public spaces are operating is important towards creating and reclaiming gathering spaces for Indigenous Peoples. Privilege and power can be difficult and overwhelming topics to grasp, but it is essential to recognize and engage with these concepts to address the role of inequality in public spaces.

In the traditional western planning framework, underutilized lots pertain to land that has not been developed to its full economic or social potential. However, Indigenous forms of land stewardship highlight the interconnectedness between humans, the land we live on, and the duty to care for the earth and its living beings as we live our lives (Dang, 2021). The Community Solutions Network (CSN) touches upon many of these perspectives in this research brief_, Applying a Decolonized Approach as the Foundation to Creating Accessible Smart City Design._

Additionally, community leaders are seeking solutions to tackle challenges caused by climate change, and to help their communities become more climate resilient. The public spaces in a community are powerful assets in these efforts, and the design and use of these spaces can be leveraged to include important solutions for climate change impacts. Through strategic approaches to public space, communities can build more sustainable places that are healthier and safer for everyone.

Communities may also not fully be aware of the options that are available to them, including technology and data solutions, to improve public spaces. Technology-based solutions can play a vital role in climate resilience for public spaces in communities. These solutions can help better understand key risks for informed decision-making, planning and investment and help mitigate and respond to the impacts of climate change.

Funded by Infrastructure Canada, the Community Solutions Network (CSN) is designed to help communities build service area capacity and improve the lives of residents using data and connected technology approaches. As the project lead, Evergreen works with lead technical partner Open North and other specialized partners to help communities navigate the smart cities landscape. Our focus includes open data and data sharing, data governance, procurement, and participatory collaboration that serves every type of community (big, mid-sized, Indigenous, rural and northern).

MEETING THE URGENCY OF THE MOMENT

This brief examines how redeveloping underutilized city-controlled sites can create vibrant community spaces that are mixed use and multifunctional and provide micro-solutions to climate adaptation and resilience.

▶ **INTRODUCTION**

Across Canada, governments and their agencies, boards and commissions have vast real estate portfolios on which they provide critical public services – schools, libraries, recreation centres, transit stations and depots, fire stations, public daycares, public parking lots, etc. Many of these sites are in prime locations, and their land area is also seriously underused. Many municipally controlled buildings are aging single- or two-story facilities surrounded by vast surface parking lots that are rarely fully used. Others are falling into deep disrepair, requiring costly renovations that their government owners simply do not have the resources to make. Still, in other cases, the building has been decommissioned from its original usage entirely and is sitting vacant, awaiting renewal. These sites are underutilized because, in their current form, the buildings themselves, the vacant air up above them, and the paved areas around them are not providing the greatest possible social or environmental benefit.

The COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated the need to address key challenges that communities of all sizes face, including affordable housing, homelessness, safe long-term care for seniors, the provision of high-quality social infrastructure that is at the core of complete communities, and resilience in the context of climate change. With respect to housing alone, _the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation_ estimates a need to construct 3.5 million new housing units nationwide by 2030 to achieve greater affordability.

To meet the urgency of the moment with its multiple intersecting crises, there is an opportunity to redevelop underused publicly-controlled sites to achieve broad social and environmental goals.

When designed with an intention focused on inclusiveness, redeveloping vacant and underused city-controlled properties can help communities build service area capacity and improve the lives of residents. Creatively co-locating land uses on underused city-controlled sites has the potential to provide sites for much needed affordable and supportive housing, long-term care homes, greenspaces, and a wide range of social infrastructure, adding vibrancy and resilience to communities. Equally important is aligning the physical infrastructure, program offerings and services to ensure the spaces created are truly inclusive for all, including youth, seniors, low-income, racialized, unhoused, and people with disabilities. Innovative technologies and approaches can be applied to make better investment choices, lower costs, and improve the environmental performance of the projects being developed.

But redeveloping underutilized publicly controlled real estate is not without risks. Publicly controlled land is a prized resource, with one shot to get it right. Moreover, it is necessary to highlight that planning is replete with inequalities and uneven power dynamics. Indigenous peoples and other equity-seeking groups have historically and continue to experience systemic barriers to partaking in the planning and utilization of public spaces in their communities.

As governance bodies worldwide are looking towards the path of decolonizing the way we evaluate land use, one must break apart how value is determined and recognized within the power structures that guide community development.

Thus, this brief identifies the scale of the opportunity to creatively re-develop municipally controlled real estate for social purposes that are led by the communities they operate in and the tools and techniques necessary to make such approaches successful.

▶ THE SCALE OF THE OPPORTUNITY

Across Canada, a significant amount of publicly controlled properties possess a variety of opportunities to better utilize certain features within them (i.e. unused parking lots, allowable air rights, vacant depots, etc.). A few examples provide a sense of the possibility:

- In Hamilton, in 2018 the local public school board had at least 10 school buildings that were vacant, *costing tens of thousands of dollars per year in maintenance alone*. A number of these schools have now been put up for sale. Across Canada there are around 14,600 schools, with school boards nationwide grappling with *issues of unfunded maintenance backlogs and surplus facilities*.

- In Winnipeg's William Whyte neighbourhood, the City-owned 25 surplus sites, 17 of which were vacant lots. Between 1999 and 2012, the City sold 302 properties to non-profits and the province for affordable housing as part of its *homelessness initiative*.

- In Stratford, Ontario, the City owns a large 18 acre brownfield site on the edge of downtown that was the former home of the Grand Trunk Railway. The site is now being re-envisioned as a future home of a mixed use community hub with housing, commercial, institutional and greenspaces.

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- In Metro Vancouver, the Musqueam, Squamish and Tsleil-Waututh Nations own and are carrying out property development on numerous sites covering over 1.1 square kilometers of land in Vancouver, Burnaby and the North Shore, *totaling over 25,500 new homes*.

- In Nunavut, the Qikiqtaaluk Corporation is an Inuit-owned development corporation that has played a leading role in developing Inuit-owned land across the territory. In Iqaluit, in collaboration with the City, the Qikiqtaaluk Corporation is undertaking a *40 acre development* adjacent to the downtown core that includes a hotel and office building, with future proposals for a Nunavut cultural centre, a healing centre, affordable housing, and elder care facility.

- In Toronto, the City's development agency CreateTO has dozens of underused properties such as surface parking lots, warehouses, and vacant office buildings publicly listed as redevelopment opportunities.

Many of the sites identified as underused and surplus are owned outright by the government and without a mortgage. They are either vacant, have dwindling usage, or the primary user has already moved out. Some sites are falling into disrepair with significant upkeep costs. The value of publicly controlled land and the potential to redevelop it with a social purpose varies on a site-by-site basis, adhering to the first principal of real estate: location, location, location. Factors that drive the value and development potential of a site include:

- Site specific conditions - location, size, topography, need for pollution remediation, servicing with basic infrastructure, proximity to transportation and other amenities.
- Existing usage and buildings on the site, which influence the cost and complexity of the project.
- Real estate market conditions, and demand for public services and housing in the area.
- The availability of public and philanthropic resources to fund any social purpose real estate projects that are not viable on a purely commercial basis.
- The strength of community support or opposition to site redevelopment.

Importantly, redeveloping city-controlled land for social purposes is being carried out in communities big and small across Canada, from large and mid-sized cities to small, rural, northern and remote communities. In many cases, city-controlled real estate is sold off to the highest bidder, with little further public influence on how the site is used, redeveloped or its social impact.

However, there are a wide variety of instances where municipalities are becoming more directly involved in the development process to move up the value chain and advance the social purpose in their developments. In each of the major projects being undertaken by several First Nations groups[1] in Greater Vancouver, the properties

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[1] The Musqueam, Squamish and Tsleil-Waututh Nations, respectively.

are being developed as rentals and leasehold tenures, with the group of First Nations *permanently maintaining ownership of the underlying land*. In Toronto, CreateTO has designated a number of surplus sites for rapid redevelopment as affordable housing, forgoing the opportunity to sell the land at the highest price in the name of advancing more financially accessible housing. In Stratford, the City has commissioned a masterplan of the large Grand Trunk site on the edge of downtown to ensure that livability, walkability, greenspace and heritage preservation are a key part of the redevelopment initiative.

▶ MIXING USES TO DRIVE SOCIAL VALUE AND CLIMATE RESILIENCE

A growing trend in city building is to accelerate the shift from single use facilities into community hubs that co-locate multiple facilities in the same area or building. Co-location provides an opportunity to create synergies between the programming, while sharing costs across multiple organizations. An additional layer can be added by designing community hubs as local solutions to climate adaptation and resilience through the implementation of climate adaptation tools in new construction. Canada is a leader in creatively mixing uses in the same building to achieve social value and advance climate resilience.

Across the country there are examples of public schools, libraries, recreation centres, fire stations and daycares, all with public and private housing or office space directly up above. Increasingly homeless shelters and affordable housing are being integrated into mixed-use buildings, co-located with upscale market housing and commercial uses, and Indigenous led health, employment, educational, and healing spaces are being co-located in large, purpose-built hubs, along with integrated housing. Deep energy retrofits, modular design systems, and mass timber construction are among the techniques being explored to lower the environmental impacts of these innovative projects.

The co-location of uses in the same building is an innovation that creates a collaborative advantage in city building, where each party achieves an outcome that is better than anyone could realize on their own. For the public sector and non-profits, partnering with the private sector can raise funding contributions and transfer risk for construction to the private sector. For the private sector, this approach to city building is not strictly a form of charity either. Engaging in partnerships with the public and non-profit sectors provide private developers with access to prime sites, partners to fill parts of the building like the podium which may be difficult to lease, and a way to overcome local community opposition to development projects. Taken together, the creative mixed use development model enables communities to derive local benefit from the growth and development that takes place in their area.

CASE STUDIES

▶ CASE STUDY 1: APPLICATION OF 'SMART TECHNOLOGIES' TO BROWNFIELD RE-DEVELOPMENT OF URBAN PUBLIC SPACES

A key element of 21st century urbanism is an emphasis on intensifying and more efficiently using land within existing built-up areas as compared to the sprawling developments of the 21st century. As many urban and rural centres underwent de-industrialization over the past few decades, communities are left with a surplus of under-utilized industrial sites that are in prime locations but may require significant environmental clean up and remediation. Over the past few decades, municipalities have been engaging in collaborative and holistic approaches to revitalize these post-industrial sites, known as brownfield redevelopments (Jamecny & Husar, 2016).

Brownfield re-development is a sustainable practice in applying 'smart growth' and adaptive reuse techniques in communities across the world. The enhancement of former industrial lands not only cleans up historically polluted areas within communities but opens up significant sites for municipalities to build and enhance public greenspaces, housing and community amenities (De Sousa, 2003). Furthermore, the application of smarter 'green infrastructure' on such sites also has positive _economic_ and ecological impacts on the communities around them (De Valck et al., 2019).

TECHNIQUES OF SMART BROWNFIELD REDEVELOPMENT IN URBAN CENTRES

Urban Vacant Land-Use (UVL) Studies

With improving access to GIS and spatial mapping technologies, there is an opportunity to conduct widescale land surveys of eligible vacant lots within their jurisdiction (Song et al., 2020; Chrysochoou et al., 2012). These assessments can be carried out by key urban stakeholders, including municipalities themselves, community

groups like Stop Sprawl Hamilton, which has conducted a vacant land survey in their city, and businesses. Furthermore, these virtual tools could be combined to cross-reference other urban sustainability factors pertaining to climate resilience, which has been piloted through some of the work in Evergreen's _AI for the Resilient City_ program.

Virtual Civic Engagement Tools

With any large-scale revitalization projects comes a need for proper placemaking and community engagement among city staff. Brownfields are no exception to this, as these communities may face gentrification because of community reinvestment (Ghosh et al., 2019). Various new tools are now available online to allow for a more holistic approach to engagement (Hammond et al., 2021). Feel free to evaluate how to utilize several tools in the _CSN Engagement Toolkit_.

Nature-Based Brownfield Remediation

With the increased focused in environmental remediation emerging in community planning, various cleaning solutions are evolving and emerging as solutions to site cleanup (Singh & Ram, 2022). Nature-based solutions paired with soil remediation techniques are being utilized across the globe as an efficient and least environmentally impactful way to both clean up urban environments while enabling the development of urban greenspaces such as forests and wetlands (Drenning et al., 2020; Masiero et al., 2022). Enabling greenspace development over brownfields can not only provide positive ecological impacts on the site; it can also create an amenity for adjacent communities and can support sustainable urban development nearby.

Terrace, British Columbia – <u>Interim Gathering Space and Community Asset</u>

The Greater Terrace Beautification Society is a community group that allocated resources to temporarily beautify a former gas station site in Terrace, BC until its owner was ready to find a permanent use for the land. The 0.12-hectare site in the downtown and had been out of use since 1998. Over a decade later, the Beautification Society launched an initiative to undertake small projects on the derelict land to *add greenery as well as art installations* to the site and allow the public to access the lot in the middle of the urban core. The site became known as Brolly Square for the public art installation featuring umbrellas, and the square became popular for gathering, concerts and events. As time passed, however, the square also was noted in the local media as a site where 'dangerous activity' takes place. The property owner (Imperial Oil) continued to have little interest in maintaining the site as a public square long-term. Imperial Oil undertook environmental assessments of the soil condition, with an eye towards selling the property. In 2022 volunteers from the Beautification Society dismantled and removed the art installation and other landscaping features from Brolly Square, *and the company prepared to put the property on the real estate market*.

General Observations:

- One best practice seen from this development was the ability for communities (and respective organizations) to contribute their own resources to beautify underutilized lots in their communities. Citizens can play a proactive role in revitalizing derelict private lands on a temporary basis even if they do not have ownership, for the benefit of the wider community.

- Without a legitimized framework or public investment to maintain community benefit from privately controlled brownfield sites, 'meanwhile uses' like interim or temporary public spaces can be removed when the private sector finds a more profitable use for the site.
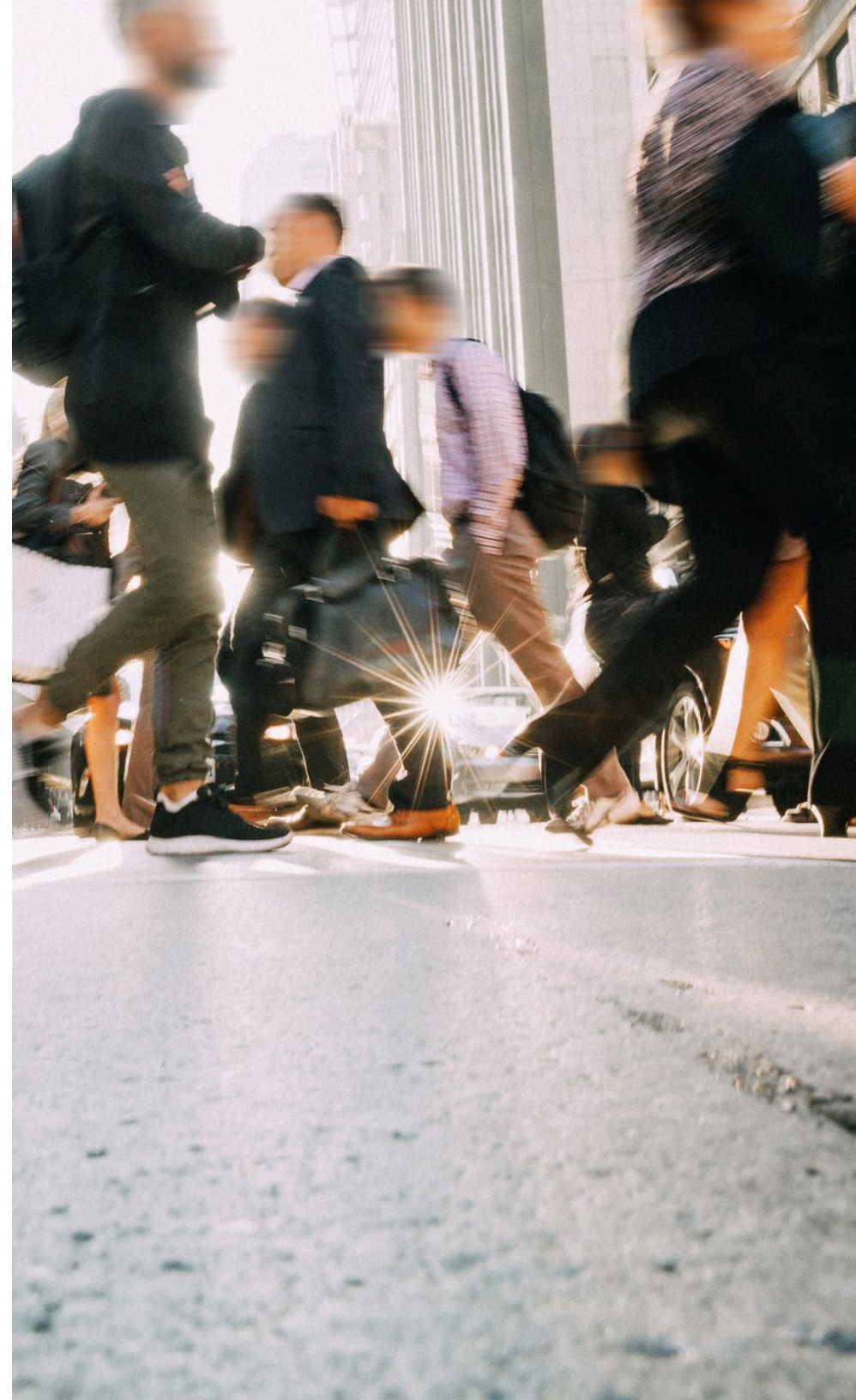
- Interim public spaces developed with the best of intentions can create much needed and well used public spaces, but such spaces can also create unintended consequences. Careful planning, design and programming is needed to ensure that these public spaces are welcoming for all users.

Orillia, Ontario – Orillia Recreational Facility

The Orillia Recreation Centre (*completed in 2022*) is a public space redevelopment that occurred through naturalizing a former foundry and gas facility that previously existed on the site. The new facility consists of a 26-acre naturalized park that includes a wetland and is connected to the city's trail system as well as a brand-new recreation centre complete with a swimming pool and other facilities. This project plan has been ongoing as early as 2009, *initially being rejected by council* for the process of cleanup posing more risks for consideration. However, the project was re-adopted in 2014 and the site *began remediation in 2015*.

General Observations:

- The city adopted a more cohesive approach to working with the Ontario Ministry of Environment to understand and streamline the process of brownfield remediation.

- Furthermore, there is thorough understanding that a project of this scale and complexity does take time however the remediation of polluted sites into ones that are environmentally friendly are necessary in the public's best interest.

Lessons Learned/Next Steps:

- Formulating a government framework that specializes in these developments, with a particular focus to remediating municipally-controlled brownfield sites and encourage public space development in large scale private projects/partnerships. (De Sousa, 2017)

- Increased tools of financing including grants, other tax-incentives (Alimovski et. al, 2019), and providing easier access to environmental remediation technologies.

- Utilizing smart data from mass undertakings into a national strategy of developing large-scale smart city projects (Kar et. al, 2019).

▶ CASE STUDY 2: REPURPOSING AND REDEVELOPING UNDERUTILIZED PUBLIC URBAN SPACES

Despite the potential to utilize urban public spaces, many of these spaces in Canada remain underused as they are not being utilized to their potential and are therefore neglected. 76% of the area in 996 population centres located in southern Canada were classified as green in 2019, indicating a drop from 80% back in 2011 (Lantz et al., 2021). Urban public spaces are meant to improve the quality of the urban environment, promote social interaction and enhance people's sense of belonging and identity (Ramlee et al., 2015). Allowing these areas to weaken would be wasteful.

These spaces can be repurposed and revitalized through accessible technologies that many cities can replicate. An example of this feature is the implementation of green energy in urban public spaces, which is explored in the toolkit Reimagining Public Spaces: Green Energy Solutions. Thorough planning and inexpensive transformation strategies are essential tools to _encourage involvement from the public and improve quality of life_. Having greenery present in urban landscapes is a key measure of sustainable development (Dobrowolski, 2018).

Inuvik, NWT – <u>Inuvik Community Greenhouse</u>

Established in 1998, the Inuvik Community Greenhouse has been a key player in _improving food security_ and providing fresh produce for the residents of Inuvik, Northwest Territories. Converted from Grollier Hall, a former hockey arena, the _16,000 square foot facility is the northernmost greenhouse in North America and among the largest in the Arctic Circle_.

The site operates from _June to September_, taking advantage of extreme amounts of daylight exposure that occurs in the summer months due to its latitude. Being _run by volunteers_, the Greenhouse is an example of a community coming together and taking the lead to improve their environmental well-being.

General Observations:

- Rather than building a new greenhouse from scratch, the Community Garden Society of Inuvik (CGSI) petitioned for the _existing infrastructure of the arena to be reused and converted_ into the Inuvik Community Greenhouse. This strategy helped mitigate costs as it was a _less expensive process_ to reuse infrastructure, which other redevelopment projects can learn from as well.

- _Solar panels are installed_ to power the Greenhouse during the brighter parts of the year. _Excess power is sold back to Northwest Territories Power Corporation_ to be used for the dark months of the year. This smart energy feature showcases the incorporation and benefits of green energy in a public space.

- The greenhouse produces bedding plants hydroponic produce, which contributes towards the offsetting of operational costs (Chen & Natcher, 2019).

- Recreational gardening and local food production provides a positive impact on the well-being of the community, strengthening their relationship with nature (Chong, 2019).

Lessons Learned/Next Steps:

- The Greenhouse is a not-for-profit system, therefore receiving regular funding is a barrier towards operations (Chong, 2019).

- The Greenhouse was able to develop positive partnerships, but due to _high turnover of volunteers there has been a loss of knowledge_, which resulted in a loss of partnerships and donations. Therefore, increased maintenance of this knowledge and partnerships is key for the Greenhouse as well.

- As a result of limited supplies and financial resources, the Greenhouse is forced to recycle whenever possible and only allows organic gardening, resulting in increased environmental awareness and sustainability (Chong, 2019; Skinner et al., 2014).

Vancouver, BC – Irving K. Barber Learning Centre (University of British Columbia)

Located at the University of British Columbia, the Irving K. Barber Learning Centre _first opened in 2008_ and is a rebuilding of the university's historic Main Library. The original structure contained the _"heritage core" that was first built in 1925_, and the redevelopment project included _193,303 square feet of new building construction_ surrounding the core.

The new development of the centre includes environmental elements within the design and contains _Canada's first Automatic Storage and Retrieval System_, which automatically collects and replaces books in collapsible storage units through robotic cranes. This technology helps reduce the amount of space taken up in the centre, enabling the incorporation of classrooms, group rooms, and offices.

General Observations:

- A radiant in-slab heating and cooling system is used, which results in _reduced energy consumption and improved indoor air quality_.
- The building uses displacement ventilation, an energy-efficient air distribution technology that introduces _cool air at low velocity, obtaining proper air quality and thermal comfort_.
- _Recycled library shelving_ has been implemented, promoting environmental efficiency.
- _Demolition materials_ are compiled, organized, and either recycled or reused in the building.
- Automatic Storage and Retrieval System uses _climate-controlled storage_ for items at the UBC library through industrial technology to store and retrieve low-use materials. The system is set to appropriate temperature and humidity levels that is _free of contaminates_.
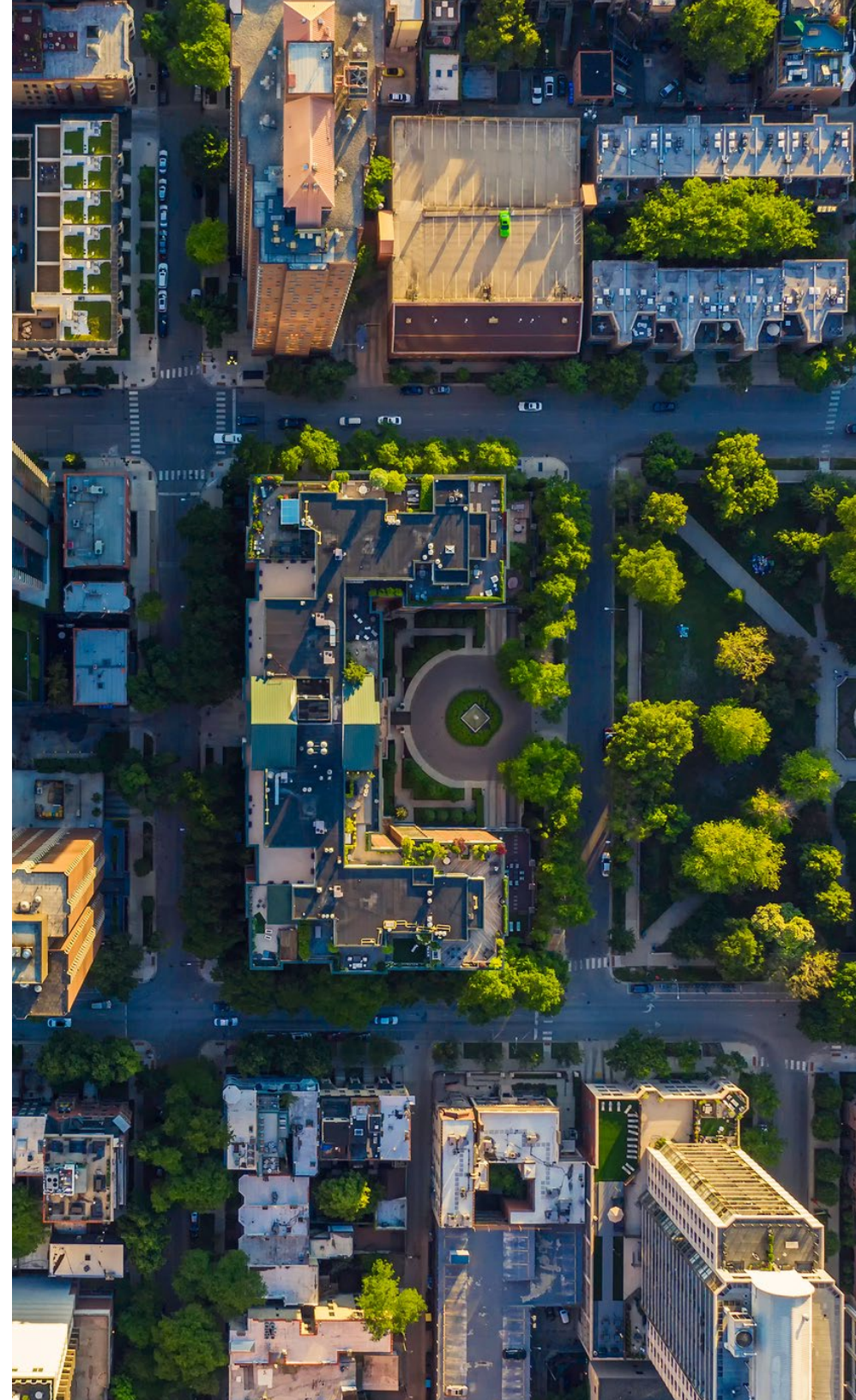
Lessons Learned/Next Steps:

- Existing staff and patrons were deeply involved in the design of the centre, and *extensive feedback was collected* from current, previous, and potential users. Consulting with different audiences is beneficial when it comes to building design, as multiple perspectives are taken into consideration to help identify problems and solutions, which will accommodate a variety of audiences overall.

- The centre works *closely with Indigenous communities in the province*, and provides the tools that Indigenous organizations need to regain lost heritage through their online library system. Prioritizing Indigenous engagement and ensuring they are receiving the support they need are essential towards sustaining healthy public spaces.

- There is strong community engagement with rural and northern communities regarding the maintenance of the centre, as the centre regularly provides opportunities for UBC students and faculty to *collaborate with rural and northern areas*. Engaging with diverse communities and maintaining these connections regularly are key for building an inclusive environment.

Toronto, ON – North Toronto Collegiate Institute Redevelopment

The redevelopment of North Toronto Collegiate Institute is an example of a replacement school that has integrated a residential development as well. The project involves a *4-storey school in addition to two condominium towers containing 500,000 square feet* of residential development. This project was initiated as a result of a public-private partnership between the Toronto District School Board (TDSB) and the developer Tridel, where the *old high school was demolished to build the new development*. The school has achieved a *LEED Gold certification, as well as an EcoSchools Platinum Certification*.

General Observations:

- The incorporation of a *green roof garden* over the school for stormwater management and *a field to promote green space* are additions that help revitalize underused areas at the school with environmental benefits.

- Radiant heating and cooling coils are integrated into the design, enabling *thermal mass to passively store thermal energy and gradually release it over time*, resulting in a decrease in energy loads.

- The building uses displacement ventilation technology, which helps *reduce fan energy and increase air quality by providing low velocity, fresh air* to classrooms.

Lessons Learned/Next Steps:

- This school is the *first public school within Toronto that was involved in a public and private partnership*. This tactic included strong participation from the community, which could be a model that other schools in the city can learn from when it comes to integrated developments.

- There was community opposition regarding the sale of public land which resulted in a *participatory planning process for engaging stakeholders*, and heritage issues were also a cause of concern. Because of these concerns, a *"heritage courtyard" was implemented* in the middle of the building where historical elements of the original building, including the original *brick archway and wooden doors*, were rebuilt. This strategy may be useful for other redevelopment projects to keep in mind when it comes to preserving the heritage of the original site and gaining community acceptance.

▶ THE ROLE OF TECHNOLOGY

The integration of innovative technologies has the potential to accelerate social purpose real estate projects, lower costs and improve the social and environmental performance of developments on city-operated lands. Innovative technologies can deliver benefits throughout the project lifecycle. At the outset of projects, updated geographic information systems and mapping software can be used as a decision support tool to model the social equity of prospective city-controlled sites and micro environmental conditions like urban heat islands and flood risk. For instance, Evergreen's *AI for the Resilient City tool* is an analytics and visualization program that enables municipalities to quickly identify the parts of cities that are most prone to the effects of high temperatures due to climate change. Furthermore, the global architecture and design firm Gensler has developed *a tool to objectively score the viability of converting underused office buildings into residential uses* based on their location, floorplate and financial potential.

As detailed design begins, 3-dimensional drafting software makes it possible to rapidly visualize project massing and design options, a key tool that can be used to support meaningful community consultation. Passive house design standards can be applied to produce low- or carbon-neutral buildings. At the same time, the roof provides an opportunity to include either a green communal space or solar panels that produce renewable energy. Tightened building codes are necessary to prepare buildings for more extreme weather like stronger winds, harder rains, hotter summers, and wildfires. In construction, modular production is becoming increasingly used to speed up building times, lower cost, reduce construction waste, and create factory-quality building seals that produce more environmentally sustainable buildings. Finally, during operations and maintenance, sophisticated building operations systems are being employed to optimize and provide constant information on lighting, heating, and cooling, and other building systems. As can be seen, not all of the 'technological innovations' are high-tech or digital. Many are innovative design, regulatory, and building practices that, taken together, advance the livability, climate resilience and social equity of the projects being built.

A how-to guide: 9 tips for effectively redeveloping municipally-controlled real estate.

1. **START WITH STRATEGY.** Deciding to redevelop underused publicly controlled property is not a small decision. It first requires municipalities and mission-driven organizations to establish strategic policy goals for their redevelopment efforts and have effective governance models in place. Is the goal to sell off surplus public properties to the highest bidder to raise much needed revenue? Or is it to leverage publicly controlled lands to meet specific social and environmental objectives, even if the project does not provide the highest returns? These critical strategic decisions should be made at the council or board level, with input from stakeholders and the community.

2. **BE DEVELOPMENT READY.** With the high costs associated with development projects, time is of the essence. Being development ready requires that public sector organizations have the technical capacity and clear governance structures to make decisions efficiently and effectively. Public sector organizations should clearly establish what decisions require council or board approval and which decisions can be made at the public service or development committee level. In general, strategic decisions about the overall direction of the project are the responsibility of the council or board, while tactical decisions about implementation reside with the organization's management and staff. Clear lines of reporting on project performance must be put in place to ensure that the council or board has sufficient information to provide effective oversight on the project. As well, real estate transactions are a place where municipal fraud and corruption has occurred from time to time, and robust anti-fraud policies and measures should be put in place.

3. **BEGIN WITH THE BEST SITES.** It seems obvious to recommend starting by redeveloping the best sites, but how exactly should those priority sites be defined? Are they the ones with the greatest financial potential, the ones that meet the greatest social inclusion and environmental needs, the ones where there is the highest level of public support, or some other set of criteria? Large, underused publicly controlled sites in prime locations with few encumbrances will have the highest financial value, and be the easiest to carry out development on. These sites should be pursued as a matter of course to gain experience and start showing early wins. At the same time, great care is necessary to ensure that the redevelopment of public-controlled real estate does not exacerbate urban inequality by concentrating growth and newly built high-quality services in the most central or wealthiest areas. Municipalities must equally focus on equity by identifying community need for new infrastructure in underserved areas as part of the evaluation process, and ensure that projects such projects are prioritized.

4. **MEANINGFUL, NOT ENDLESS CONSULTATION.** Communities develop close attachments with their public lands and facilities. There is no doubt that proposals to identify publicly controlled sites as 'underused' and mark them for redevelopment can be a contentious process. Community contestation often revolves around concerns over the privatization of public land, the proposal of new locally unwanted land uses the removal of cherished heritage buildings or communal meeting places, displacement of existing services before replacements are opened, or buildings that are seen to worsen conditions for existing residents. Not in My Backyard neighbours have opposed all sorts of infill development proposals, from affordable housing, to group homes for youth with disabilities, to new daycares, to midrise housing developments. If greater equity is to be achieved and cities are to meet the urgency of the moment by redeveloping public lands, a new balance will be necessary that listens to and incorporates community input without giving

in to the loudest voices who oppose any change. One strategy that has been used is meaningful consultation culminating in the drafting of binding project charters or community benefit agreements. Community benefit agreements identify the specific local benefits that are set to be achieved by a development project, provide measurable targets, and create joint tables to monitor results and resolve issues as they arise. Another approach is to optimize the staging of project construction to ensure that any existing public services or housing on the site remains open for as long as possible until a replacement is available. As well, governments have a statutory duty to consult with Indigenous groups.

5. **SEEK COLLABORATIVE ADVANTAGES WITH PROSPECTIVE PARTNERS.** Look for partners where there is alignment in the vision and the values of the organizations, and for the goals of the joint project. A benefit of the land being publicly controlled is that the government partner has control over the process of selecting partners. The goal of working in partnership is to achieve outcomes that are better than any one party could realize on their own. Across Canada, there are non-profit and Indigenous organizations that have scale and skill in social purpose real estate and have collaborated with municipalities and public agencies to deliver successful projects. This includes non-profit housing providers like Woodgreen and Indwell, arts organizations like Artscape, credit unions like Alterna and VanCity, and the Hamilton Community Foundation and other foundations that are increasingly investing their endowments in social purpose real estate projects. Indigenous-led redevelopment projects such as the Opaskwayak Cree Nation's Young Street mixed housing project for Indigenous students and elders in downtown Winnipeg and the Indigenous Hub led by the Anishnawbe Health Toronto, Miziwe Biik development corporation and the Mississaugas of the New Credit highlight the possibilities through meaningful collaborations. These organizations have a stated mandate to deliver on a strong social mission alongside ensuring projects are financially viable. There are also a growing number of private developers who are gaining experience in social purpose real estate. A critical question is how to pick the partners for a project. In some special cases, partners may be selected by direct award, and Indigenous project leaders and partners participate in projects that are deeply rooted within their own territories. In other cases, municipalities will carry out an open, transparent bidding process. Rather than simply focusing on achieving the lowest cost, governments should focus on the proposal that delivers the best overall financial and community value.

6. **TAP FUNDING FROM MULTIPLE SOURCES.** Cities are often land rich and cash poor. Even with free land, they may struggle to pay for the cost of building and operating a new social-purpose real estate project on their own. Developing mixed-use buildings on public lands in partnership with other organizations enables municipalities to tap into multiple sources of funding to makes it possible to offset the costs of the social purpose spaces and build the project. The range of funding sources can include: senior government grants, low interest loans from the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, non-profit organizations that can tap into philanthropy and foundation funding, and civic institutions like schools, daycares and recreation centres that have their own revenue sources. Including market residential units and retail on a site or in a building can also be used in the financial equation to cover some costs of the social purpose portion of the building. Revenues collected through municipal density bonus and accelerated permitting programs can create further revenue to offset the social purpose costs of the project. Taken as a whole, this cobbled approach to funding can be time consuming and lengthy to arrange, but in a world of tight budgets and unpredictable grants, it gives municipalities control to get on with critical projects without waiting for subsidies from other orders of government.

7. **TECH-ENABLED, NOT TECH-DRIVEN:** Innovative technologies are best included in social purpose real estate when they advance the mandate of the project, rather than driving the mission or the selection of a service provider. Technologies are tools and should be seen as means to an end. New techniques and approaches like modular construction, digital visualization software, innovative construction approaches and smart city technologies all have the potential to improve the efficiency of a project. However, the benefits of novel technologies are often over sold, and add risk and long-term costs of maintenance and obsolescence to a project. Innovative technologies should be carefully reviewed and piloted before being implemented for large-scale projects.

8. **EXPERTISE AND CAPACITY MATTERS.** Beyond establishing the project vision, social purpose real estate projects that intensify the use of publicly controlled properties are complex design, financial and legal undertakings. To be effective, each party in a social-purpose real estate project requires a minimum level of technical expertise to communicate and engage in a common language and at a common level. There are three ways to garner expertise- hire outside advisors, partner with skilled external organizations, and create in-house capacity. In circumstances where a municipality, Indigenous Nation, or non-profit has a portfolio of many underused sites that it plans to redevelop, it may make sense to create an in-house team or department to manage multiple projects over time, as Toronto has done with the establishment of CreateTO. Similarly, the Musqueam, Squamish, and Tsleil-Waututh Nations jointly formed the MST Development Corporation to oversee the development of their properties in Metro Vancouver, which together total over 160 acres. And the United Church has set up Kindred Works as an in-house hub of expertise to support local congregations as they intensify the vast portfolio of over 3,000 churches across Canada. For municipalities just starting out or more likely to do only a small number of projects, hiring experienced consultants on a project-by-project basis may be more effective. Regardless of the model to bring the necessary expertise to a project, redeveloping publicly real estate is not a 'set it and forget it' type of undertaking. The public sector land owner must be ever present to drive the vision of the project and ensure that the results are met. They must also have enough expertise in real estate development and project management to ask the right questions and protect the public interest as the project proceeds.

9. **PLAN UPFRONT FOR OPERATIONS AND MAINTENANCE.** Once the project is built, and the ribbon is cut on opening day, real estate projects have long lifespans. Municipalities must plan and budget in advance for facility operations and maintenance over its entire lifespan. In cases where a mixed-use building is developed that involve multiple parties, a project agreement is developed at the outset that outlines the building's governance, who has access to each part of the building, and who pays for the costs of operating and maintaining various parts and components of the facility. The project agreement must also set out dispute resolution protocols, ideally, measures that avoid legal actions for all but the most extreme circumstances.

▶ GLOSSARY

Public Spaces   Areas or places that are open and accessible to all people, including streets, public squares, parks, beaches, and civic spaces. Successful public spaces are designed with all residents in mind and allow people to interact with these spaces in different ways. Great spaces enhance livable cities by supporting a sense of connection, individual and social wellbeing, and community expression, identity and diversity.

Civic Commons   is a term to describe a network of public places and facilities that enable communities to learn, celebrate, express collective actions, collaborate and flourish together. It can include libraries, parks, community centres, squares and more.

Smart Cities   are resilient, inclusive and collaboratively-built cities that use technology and data as a tool rather than an end in themselves to better the quality of life for all people.

Underutilized Lands/Lots   in the context of this brief, are developed publicly-controlled properties within a region that are not maximising their full social, environmental, cultural, or economical potential in accordance to the interests of their respective communities.

Community   is a group of beings (both human and not) who steward, reside, and live their lives interconnectedly within an identified fabric that may include but is not limited to land, water, culture, and shared values. These may include neighbourhoods, villages, municipalities, and sovereign nations. Though the scale could range from a small group to the globe, many smaller communities are valid and do exist within much larger ones.

Brownfield Re-Development   The redevelopment of former industrial sites in municipalities that may require environmental clean-up and remediation.

Deindustrialization   the process by which a country or area depends less and less on industry to provide most of its work or income.

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