Beyond an Eyesore

Re-Imagining Scarborough's Strip Malls as a Network of Public Spaces

by
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Author’s Declaration

I hereby declare that I am the sole author of this thesis. This is a true copy of the thesis, including any required final revisions, as accepted by my examiners.

I understand that my thesis may be made electronically available to the public.

Abstract

This thesis celebrates the vitality and public life of the post war era strip malls located in Toronto's inner suburb of Scarborough. These spaces are ritualistically utilitarian and informal social destinations due to their easy accessibility and the variety of small local independent retailers. The question examined by this thesis is, what is the everyday accessible public space of a pluralistic society in an inner suburban context? By building upon theory and design precedents, this thesis materializes the potential in the future for community vibrancy without diminishing the existing vitality and public life of Scarborough's strip malls. This full potential of strip malls is realized by reimagining them as a connected network of public spaces, which are pluralistic social destinations with permanent and impermanent spatial interventions that promote gathering for daily use and events in indoor and outdoor conditions. This thesis is accomplished through texts, narratives, maps, photographs, and drawings which outline the present situation and propose a future design approach.

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To Scarborough, thank you for welcoming me eleven years ago.

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Preface

Thesis Question

What is the everyday accessible public space of a pluralistic society in an inner suburban context?

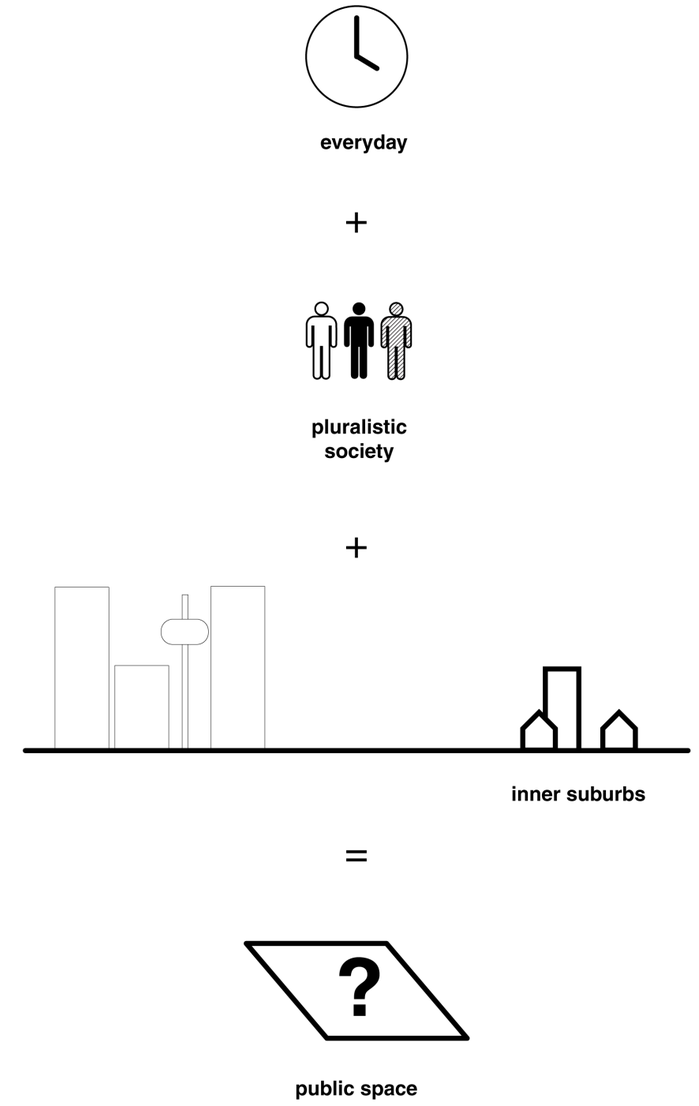


Fig.1: Question, diagram

Thesis Problem

The problem is that the existing vitality and public life of Scarborough's post war era strip malls is not celebrated, and the potential vitality and public life are not easy to materialize. First, everyday life in Scarborough's strip malls is not celebrated through designed spaces. Second, there is a lack of local public spaces for communities to participate in the existing (and potential) social milieu in Scarborough's strip malls which can be considered the de facto public spaces. Third, the vitality of these strip malls could greatly benefit from the facilitation of alternate transportation methods by improving connection between them, but active mobility methods such as walking, and cycling are not embraced on the street fabric in Scarborough. Fourth, since many of the post war strip malls have either aged or are aging rapidly to their end of lifespan the present vitality formed by them has not been addressed for future continuation.

Challenges and contradictions emerge from the designation of designed public spaces in the strip mall. First, coexistence of strip mall public space in a private property is a contested proposition because in the negotiated relations between the public and private parties, the limits of intervention and the use of the public spaces will be impacted. Second, Scarborough's strip malls exist on a suburban landscape which has catered to the automobile which forces any proposed active mobility amenities to be subdued by the existing vehicular scale of street infrastructure.

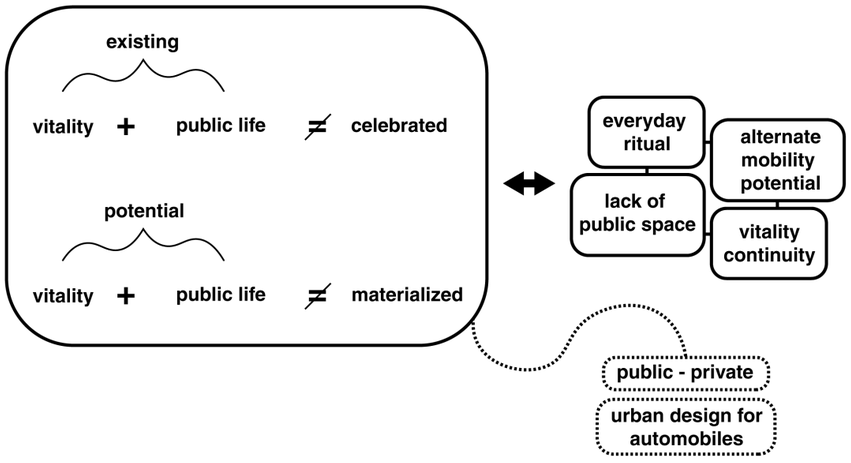


Fig.2: Problem, diagram

Thesis Objectives

1. To create human friendly public spaces which allow people to rest, practice creativity and enjoy the moment everyday with an amplified vitality and public life.
2. To ensure that the interventions on the strip malls provide full benefit for the community patrons and independent shop owners without destroying any existing vitality and public life.
3. To create a design criterion applicable for strip malls anywhere.

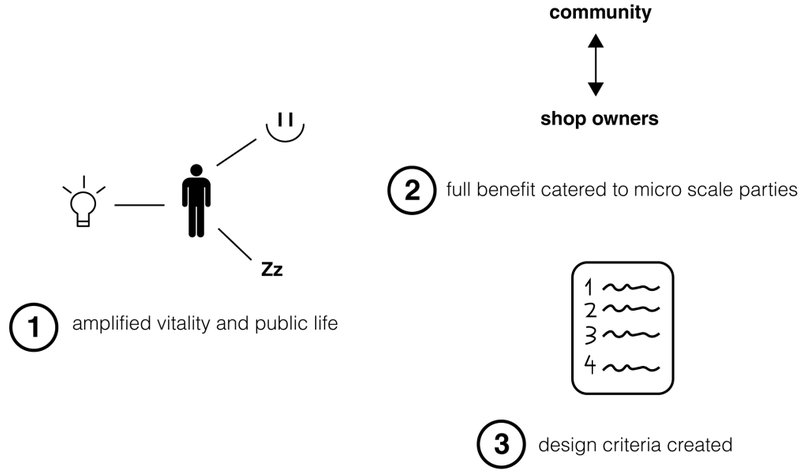


Fig.3: Objectives, diagram

Thesis Assumptions

Due to time constraints and the COVID-19 pandemic restrictions, the following thesis assumptions were made:

1. Strip mall owners and/or shop owners are willing to lose some parking spaces and allow second floor interventions (if no existing second floor currently) in return for public spaces which bring in more pedestrian traffic.
2. The City of Toronto is willing to encourage and support trees, cycle lanes, median strips, and crosswalks to be implemented on the arterial roads.
3. For the interventions, there is a committed fund in place from different parties, both government and private sectors.

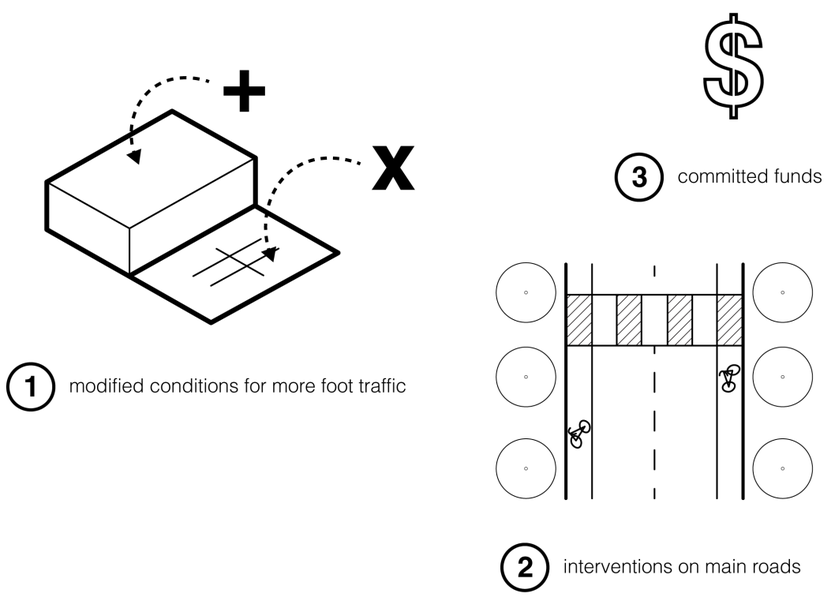


Fig.4: Assumptions, diagram

Useful Thesis Definitions

Strip mall—adjoined retail clusters with automobile parking

BIA—Business Improvement Area, business collective which pool funds that can be matched by the city of Toronto for streetscape improvements and community events while sharing a common name as a destination i.e.—Wexford Heights BIA

Automobile—road vehicle, i.e.—a sedan

Public space—indoor and outdoor intervention on strip mall area

Network—cycle lane and crosswalk

Community hub—public space cluster

Daily use area—public space zone that occupies the same location every day

Event area—public space zone that occupies the same location on preplanned days

Mom-and-pop shop—small and local independent retail shop typically owned by a single family

Thesis Scope

The geographic scope of this research and design thesis is in Scarborough, which is an inner 1960s era suburb located in the City of Toronto, Ontario, Canada. The reason for this scope limit is because Scarborough is a major multicultural urban area for the working-class population of Toronto, a place where the strip malls reflect the needs of its population. This research and design, however, can potentially be applied to a larger scope outside of Scarborough, whether nationally, or internationally in the United States.



Fig.5: Context, diagram

Methodology

The methodology for this research is segmented into three parts, present situation, proposed situation, and future situation.

The present situation culminates in the fundamental research portion for this thesis where Scarborough and strip mall specific aspects are studied as follows: literature theory analysis, the origination of strip malls, how Scarborough was formed in respects to land development and planning, Canada's points-based immigration system, Scarborough's demography, strip mall conditions today including typology, spatial quality, vitality, public life, Scarborough's mobility conditions, COVID-19 public space creations and precedent project reviews. These are researched through context specific archival searches, texts such as journals, census demography data maps, firsthand experience culminating in narratives, photographs to study public life, typologies and spatial quality, and drawings such as diagrams, axonometrics and perspectives to represent the existing spatial elements.

The proposed situation is represented through maps, and drawings such as diagrams, axonometrics and perspectives, which is a response to a design criterion using a top-down and bottom-up design methodology to implement public spaces and the network binding them. The design criteria to create a successful network of public spaces using strip malls is established by synthesizing the present situation. The top-down method which is a unified approach for the public space and network, does two things on a map. First, it defines the scope of intervention by locating independent shop clusters which are not to be affected by immediate demolition and existing permanent cycle routes. Second it implements interventions by designating strip mall clusters within a Business Improvement Area (BIA) and with ample parking spaces as community hubs, and by implementing on street cycle route that connects the community hubs while weaving into existing permanent cycle routes and parks. The bottom-up method is segmented for the network and public spaces while utilizing drawings and maps for its representation and includes a set of layered physical design intervention elements. These range from permanent street improvements to pop-up celebration. The design proposal in conjunction with the present situation results in managerial challenges which are categorized and addressed as ownership, time, scale, and business competition.

The future situation involves studying the general patterns of private development in Scarborough. Then, a recent architectural competition entitled Strip Appeal will be reviewed. Lastly, the impact of this thesis will be discussed as a conclusion.

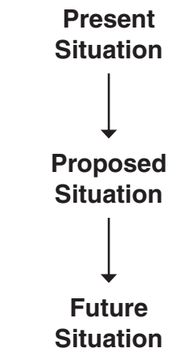


Fig.6: Methodology, diagram

Introduction

A product of the post war era suburban sprawl with single use zoning, strip malls were designed for speed—that of the automobile and quick in-and-out shopping. Post WW2 modernist era planning celebrated the separation of city uses through zoning which made residential areas isolated from commercial areas. With that, automobiles became the necessary connecting mechanism between the various functionally separated nodes of life, and scattered destinations removed the opportunity for casual and incidental human presence in the different areas of the city. This approach to planning created arterial roads of large width and parking lots always took precedence over the human scale. While strip malls are born out of this planning ideology for a definite purpose and are connected to other parts of life via the automobile, they have always been vital to their surrounding communities due to their convenience, utility, and proximity—these elements are built into their physical attributes. With schools and churches, each located separately, strip malls are the only place for local social life. Typically comprised of large parking lots backed from arterial roads, strip malls represent a minimum level of architecture—a box made of poorly crafted essential materials divided into individual unassuming shops with exterior signages, ranging from one to two stories in height. Their inherent unassuming character and affordability have always embraced independent mom-and-pop shops.

With Canada's points system merit-based immigration reform welcoming diverse groups of new Canadians in the late 1960s[1], certain parts of cities have witnessed a visible influx of ethno-racial minority populations because of affordable rents. One such is Scarborough, an inner suburb of Toronto which was planned under Modernist ideologies during the Second World War housing boom. With this present population influx and lower occupying cost, strip malls in Scarborough have inadvertently evolved to become the provision for essential, diverse, and multicultural retail landscapes of mom-and-pop shops which cater to the working-class communities they surround today. Irrespective of their poor spatial qualities, with time, utility, and proximity, they have organically evolved to become local community destinations, making them increasingly vital to the neighbourhood they anchor. For patrons, strip malls are fluid and multifarious spaces which are both utilitarian and social destinations for everyday life. Fluid, because they are easily accessible in their adjacency to arterial roads, their parking lots allow effortless automobile parking, and their maximum two-story height and ground floor retail shops embrace a human scale. Multifarious, because they offer various necessary and optional retail uses under one building form. Because of necessary shops such as ethnic groceries and barbershops, they also form a sense of public life with informal parking lot social gatherings amongst friends and a social aura in the utilitarian shops themselves. On the other hand, for the independent retailers, Scarborough's post war era strip malls provide cheaper occupying cost inadvertently due to their aging griminess, lack of walkability and use intensity. While griminess yields cheaper occupying cost in addition their appearance as eyesores—naturally derived

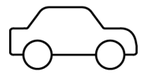


Fig.7: Automobile-Oriented Design, diagram

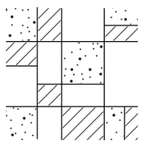


Fig.8: Zoning, diagram

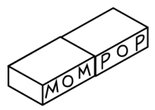


Fig.9: Independent Retail Businesses, diagram

67 pts
=
Immigrate!

Fig.10: Points System Immigration, diagram



Fig.11: Life Ritual Destinations, diagram



The strip mall shown in this photo is Wexford Heights Plaza in the Wexford community of Scarborough. This is a typical arterial traffic condition—shown here is Lawrence Avenue East—from which the strip mall is backed away from. The scale of spaces dedicated to the automobile, like parking and the seven lane road covered in asphalt, discourages pedestrian life by making the private automobile as a necessary mobility method. Lawrence Avenue East is a part of the larger road grid system of Scarborough, consisting of strip malls along the network. The photo being taken from the other side of the arterial road shows the lack of pedestrian or micro level connectedness across the road system—in the present situation, the automobile is necessary to move between strip malls at an immediate and city scale—limiting the full possibility of a vibrant street.

Fig.12: Wexford Heights Plaza 1; Scarborough; 2020, photo

from decades of aging and poor maintenance—the latter have the potential to evolve. Lack of walkability and use intensity are long standing issues comprised of overscaled and underutilized parking lots, disconnection from each other on the arterial roads and their single-story heights. Parking lots are underutilized because they are rarely fully filled with automobiles which signifies the potential room for activities. Strip malls are physically disconnected from each other because of wide roads with no pedestrian crossings linking adjacent ones. Their dispersed presence throughout the main roads lacks visual cohesion. Although they vary in height ranging from two to one storeys, which makes their scale human friendly, their primary character as a basic single storey form has the potential to be enhanced with activities above it.

Concurrent to the strip malls' problems, there is a lack of designed everyday-use public spaces in Toronto's inner suburban communities, like Scarborough. While parks of varied scales are located throughout the city, those are places where one takes their children or to play sports in the grassy areas. Their presence are hidden away, buried in the neighbourhoods, from everyday commercial life. Like parks, strip malls are also located throughout Scarborough, but in contrary, their utility and visibility from the main roads provide physical and visual accessibility as long as you own a car. In this differentiable aspect of strip malls, there lies an opportunity to intensify their use with a richer mix of public activities. Also, in addition to parks, cycle routes in Scarborough primarily exist in trails—hidden away from urban conditions. There is an opportunity to reveal them onto the streets through cycle lanes to encourage an active and sustainable mode of transportation for the everyday life. Cycling coupled with public activities, both of which are revealed on the street fabric of Scarborough, could make daily life more enjoyable—potentially forming a more diverse network of public spaces.

Finally, despite the spatial shortcomings of strip malls, these are the last remaining places where small independent retailers can financially survive. Scarborough's post war era strip malls are vital to the community patrons and independent shop owners. This thesis is interested in strip malls with independent shops, rather than newer strip malls with solely chain shops. Toronto's inner suburban strip malls, such as Scarborough's, possess good elements which make them vibrant. Presently, however, they lack transformable spatial elements which can be reimagined with fruitful design interventions for the community patrons and shop owners alike. This thesis will demonstrate design interventions that can provide a better quality of life for working-class communities of Scarborough by spatially enhancing public places for more frequent use through public programming. Simultaneously, there is an opportunity to provide the facilitation to continue the spirit of these public spaces into the future for Scarborough's communities and beyond.



Fig.13: Potential Despite Defect, diagram



Fig.14: Lack of Daily Public Space, diagram



Fig.15: Cycling as Mobility?, diagram



Fig.16: Affordable Spaces, diagram



Fig.17: Celebration for Continuity, diagram



In this photo, Wexford Heights Plaza is shown to contain a rich diversity of primarily mom-and-pop retail shops which contrasts the grim bleakness of the asphalt parking lot. There is a hidden vitality in these spaces due to the utilitarian shops and proximity to residential areas which aids the creation of an informal and local community life between the patrons and shop owners. The low height and the spaces between the shops of the strip mall building provides a human scale condition, unlike its parking counterpart. Being a single storey strip mall, the roof can host public life, in addition to the parking lot which is underutilized in its core purpose as an automobile storage.

Fig.18: Wexford Heights Plaza 2; Scarborough; 2020, photo

Present Situation

The present situation is a study into theoretical background works that correspond to this thesis and also ones that fail to realize the full potential in relation to the context of strip malls and inner suburbs. This section also outlines the forces that shaped the context of Scarborough and strip malls, factors like Canadian immigration laws and migration movements into the City of Toronto. Furthermore, this is also an inquiry into the current conditions of the strip malls including the public life and physical spaces. There is an element of economy and management in the strip malls and it is studied. The mobility situation in Scarborough is synthesized. Lastly, the impact of covid-19 pandemic and climate change is discussed.

Literature and Theory Review

The following works are useful for this thesis but fail to understand existing small scale ethnic vibrancy or realize the full diverse potential of inner suburban strip malls.

Ellen Dunham-Jones and June Williamson

Retrofitting Suburbia: Urban Design Solutions for Redesigning Suburbs

This book is a guide for designers, planners, community leaders and policy makers to rethink the possibilities of the American suburbs. The overarching theme is to revitalize, intensify and reshape suburbia's building forms and urban fabric for social, environment and cost benefit. While it succeeds in pointing to the environmental and social problems of suburbia and uncovering design potentials i.e.—converting abandoned big box retail into mega churches, it only does so for dilapidated sites. And these design suggestions imply large overhauls to urbanize the suburbs which creates totalizing changes only applicable for areas with no existing vitality and public life. The urbanization, repurposing, adaptive reuse, regreening and revitalization methodology in the suburban retrofit narrative of this book fails to address the vibrant aspects of present situations like the inner-city suburban strip mall of Scarborough—small independent business clusters which are utilitarian and diverse ethnic retail shops for every day use by the communities they surround and cater to. Furthermore, in failing to address vibrancy of present situations of suburbia, it suggests that social activities are only "tended to be organized around the home, workplace, or school" in suburbia. Besides the non applicable factors, the idea to reimagine mobility and roads mentioned in this book can become a background to this thesis, as the issues of automobile centric movement dehumanizes everyday life. Despite its failure pertaining to strip malls, the future situation of them as they come to their end of life could benefit from ideas generated from this book i.e.—mixed use developments, albeit with recognition of the present situation, through design decisions and policies to grant opportunities for small independent retail businesses and communities to celebrate the local life.[2]



Fig.19: Ellen Dunham-Jones, photo



Fig.20: June Williamson, photo

existing vitality
≠ recognized

rethink mobility
= applicable

Fig.21: Retrofitting Suburbia, diagram

Daniel Rotsztain

Enhancing Strip Mall Landscapes in Toronto's Inner Suburbs / plazaPOPS

Rotsztain's Master of Landscape of Architecture thesis focuses on the under-utilized nature of the landscapes surrounding the strip malls of the Greater Toronto Area. In recognizing the potential to address the vibrant life produced by the existing local business in the inner suburb of Toronto, he interviews all parties involved to get a better grasp for his approach to providing a guideline for landscape enhancement - patrons, business owners, strip mall owners and city officials. While his approach to understanding the situation is well informed, his proposal lacks real effect for the communities of the strip malls besides mere sitting arrangements. It falls short because the solution for enhancement is merely a design guide negotiating with the challenges and contradictions which contains no impactful design proposal. Despite its shortcomings, a program called plazaPOPS from his thesis made way for a built pilot project entitled WexPOPS in Scarborough which is a design precedent for this thesis.



Fig.22: Daniel Rotsztain, photo

There are two issues with Rotsztain's thesis. First, it does not utilize the understanding of the strip mall potential to produce a design proposal or reimagination. Rather, it results in a policy handbook that becomes a guide of when to implement the program. It successfully lists the official and permit policy challenges in a Toronto context but does not provide a design guideline or methodology of the plazaPOPS program itself. Second, his approach to celebrate the gist of the current vibrancy of Toronto's inner suburban strip mall is a weak one—it does not imagine the full mixed-use possibilities of social, cultural, and economic activities. While his idea of plazaPOPS have resulted in a built pilot project called WexPOPS (not presented as part of the thesis) in a summer month of 2019 at Wexford Heights Plaza in Scarborough, it was still only a temporary small-scale tactical urbanism project that does not create lasting effects for the communities and shop owners. While it situates itself in the parking lot following good design principles and challenges and potentials of the strip malls outlined in his thesis, the overly small scale of intervention and its generic design quality does not suggest an effective solution in celebrating and increasing the vibrancy for the daily life of the strip malls.[3]

Albeit his thesis's weakness in fully capitalizing on the potential of the strip malls, the understanding of characteristics, challenges and opportunities formed in Rotszain's research will inform background information in the preface and present situation portion of this thesis, as well as becoming a foundation on which to continue more imaginative design proposal.



Fig.23: plazaPOPS, diagram

design
≠ full potential

Fig.24: Retrofitting Suburbia, diagram

The following broader theoretical works aid the understanding of the present situation and direct the design direction for a proposed situation

Despite the conditions mentioned in the following intellectual allies are for an urban context, the goal is to extract successful conditions of public spaces and applying them into a suburban context for the proposed situation design. Since there is a lack of well published literature which seek to reimagine existing suburban public life, this thesis positions itself as an importation of good design principles

of public spaces from the information available. While much of the literature were published in the last century, the human motifs remain the same.

Jan Gehl and Gehl Architects

"[A] good city is like a good party: guests stay because they are enjoying themselves."[4]

Jan Gehl dedicated his career as an architect and an urban design consultant to improve the quality of urban life by focusing on human centric needs. His firm Gehl Architects, or simply Gehl, primarily based out of Copenhagen, has helped reshape the fabric of many international cities for better places for people. Under the umbrella of Gehl, there are four segments reviewed for this thesis—Life Between Buildings, Cities for People, Soft City and Twelve Urban Quality Criteria.



Fig.25: Jan Gehl, photo

Life Between Buildings: Using Public Space

In this earlier book, Gehl enchants the significance of quality urban outdoor public spaces to create better places for humans. First, he describes the measure of a good public space has a combination of necessary, optional, and social activities. Second, in the relationship to buildings and adjoining outdoor spaces, there should be conditions to assemble or disperse, integrate or segregate, invite or repel, open up or close in and increase or reduce public on the ground level. Third, spaces for walking and staying is crucial in the measure of successful public spaces. These spaces offer pleasant conditions to walk, stand, sit, see, hear, and talk.[5]

Cities for People

In this later book which is another classic in the design of urban public spaces, factors that celebrate the public life are detailed—human dimension, senses and scale, lively, safe, sustainable and healthy city, the city at eye level, and life, space, buildings—in that order.

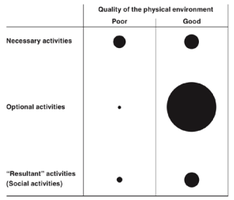


Fig.26: Public Space Quality, diagram

Human dimension: With a critique against the separation of uses in modernism and the automobile as a parasite in the city, this segment highlights the human need for well designed public spaces that is inviting and filled with activities.

Senses and scale: This segment describe the human as a "linear, frontal, horizontal mammal walking at max 5km/h—3mph". With that, for human friendly urban spaces, there is a necessity for them to be a small "warm" scale that embraces the human dimension.

Lively, safe, sustainable, and healthy city: For lively conditions, catering to the human scale also means prioritizing streets for the pedestrian and cycle traffic, not the fast movement of automobile. For safety, clear view to the surroundings, life in the buildings, clear urban structure and people's presence can naturally create safer

conditions. For a sustainable and healthy city, active mobility and organic exercising opportunities will do the part.

The city at eye level: Utilizing the eye level as a foundation for design, which is the realization that an active ground floor is the most significant public realm, entails a better urban experience. This means a flat connection form the street to the building, fluid pedestrian street crossings, multifarious sitting possibilities, wholistic sensory experience—visually aesthetic, audible conversations and music and talking opportunities, events, activities and self expression possibilities and opportunities to enjoy good aspects of the weather.

Life, space, buildings—in that order: Planning with a bottom-up scale in combination with a top down one will ensure that the human dimension and experience is not forgotten.[6]

Soft City: Building Density for Everyday Life

This book is authored by David Sim, a partner creative director at Gehl Architects. This work builds on the theories of Jan Gehl to describe building density creation for the everyday life. Sim describes 'soft' with relational words that capture its aura—responsiveness, ease, comfort, sharing, plurality, simplicity, smallness, appealing to the senses, calm, trust, consideration, invitation, and ecology. Furthermore, through visual diagrams and examples, Sim lays out the nine criteria for liveable urban density—diversity of built form, diversity of outdoor spaces, flexibility, human scale, walk ability, sense of control and identity, a pleasant microclimate, smaller carbon footprint and greater biodiversity. Although this book is focused on density creation, the criteria focusing on the public realm is relevant to this thesis's goal of creating public spaces. For the proposed thesis design, all but one criterion is significant to the intervention scope which is, diversity of built form. To reflect on the future situation of the strip malls, the aforementioned criterion is significant.[7]



Fig.27: Variety of Cyclists, diagram



Fig.28: Sonder Boulevard; Copenhagen, diagram

Twelve Urban Quality Criteria

Finally, these criteria are a summation of the theory presented in the aforementioned books under Jan Gehl. This defined set of qualitatively quantitative measure of the success of urban public spaces will inform the creation of a strip mall specific design guideline for public space. Primary three segments are protection, comfort, and enjoyment. These are sub categorized in total to be twelve criteria such as scale, options for seeing, and protection against traffic and accidents.[8]

1. **Protection**
2. **Comfort**
3. **Enjoyment**

Fig.29: Twelve Urban Quality Criteria Summary, diagram

Jane Jacobs

The Death and Life of Great American Cities

"The more successfully a city mingles everyday diversity of uses and users in its everyday streets, the more successfully, casually (and economically) its people thereby enliven and support well-lo-



Fig.30: Jane Jacobs, photo

cated parks that can thus give back grace and delight to their neighborhoods instead of vacuity."[9]

In this book, Jacobs criticizes the automobile oriented modernist planning as a failure since they do not address the social needs of the human—tabula rasa planning, separation of uses entailing the need for automobiles to get around and large sterile functionless places between buildings. She describes the nature of successful human friendly social cities embrace safety through eyes on the streets as the way for organic surveillance and contact to allow for chance encounters between people. To create such safe and fun urban environments, she describes necessary diversity generating, vitality inducing and people-oriented planning tactics—diversity of uses, small blocks, essentiality of aged buildings, concentration of people, and automobile attrition.

Firstly, a diversity of uses provides reasons for humans to be at a place during different times of the day. While this is evident in the diverse commercial activity in the strip malls, more communal gatherings can be introduced.

Secondly, small blocks allow for efficient pedestrian movement. The front parking lots of the strip malls where most of the public life occurs, have the potential to be made more human scale with interventions. Additionally, crosswalks on arterial roads connecting strip malls on opposite sides can make pedestrian flow more efficient and human friendly.

Thirdly, aged buildings, due to their time in place, have financially and physically weathered their designated purposes to be adapted to diversity of new uses, even if its only for a diverse commercial use. As such, they out to embrace the non gentrified activities of human needs. This is evident in the significant presence of vital independent small businesses over chain shops in Scarborough's post war era strip malls, as such they are inheritance which need to be celebrated.

Fourthly, concentration of people derived from a diversity of concentrated uses create vitality and safe environments through eyes on the streets. In realizing the full potential of the strip malls, new non-commercial programs can be introduced to celebrate the public of the local community.

Lastly, automobile attrition improves the environment for people by making automobile movement and presence more efficient. In the strip mall parking, automobile parking can be shared with public life activities where each presence can be ephemeral depending on the need. In the arterial roads, protected cycle path can take one automobile lane each way to introduce coexistence between active and non active mobility. Simultaneously, crosswalks can slow down automobile speed and reveal the possibility for coexistence with minimal intervention. In meeting these five conditions to address the need for eyes on the street and contact can celebrate the vitality of strip malls in Scarborough.[10]

1. **Diversity of uses**
2. **Small blocks**
3. **Aged buildings necessity**
4. **People concentration**
5. **Automobile attrition**

Fig.31: Vitality Creation, diagram

Michel de Certeau

The Practice of Everyday Life

"[S]pace is a practiced place."[11]

De Certeau segments two dualities, the authority, and the common man. The authority inflicts power through strategized spatial organization. This is evident in the orderly modernist top-down planning of suburban sprawls and zoning of uses. This macro strategy implies fixation of places such as strip malls in a particular location while their rigid form embraces the lack of adaptability from their initial design. The authority's establishment of a locatable formal place negates the bottom-up life. So, to create a form of balance on the other side exist the common man establishing the ordinary culture through disorderly uses and tactics in the everyday life. De Certeau explains how pedestrian walking on a planned city liberate spaces for occupation on strategized conditions. In their fluid transformation of strategized places in micro ways, the common man ephemerally creates spaces for their own life.

This duality of authority and the common man describes the present situation of Scarborough's strip malls very well—small businesses tactically transform the rigid store organization to directly cater to the diverse needs of the communities they surround which invites patrons to informally gather in or around the strip malls for social respite. By practicing the strip mall's situated orderly existence, shopkeepers and the patrons collectively create an ordinary culture for Scarborough's everyday life. Although this practice is ephemeral because external authoritative economic and political orders can be subversive to the disorder in the present situation, there is an opportunity to celebrate the tactical practices through intensified communal activities.[12]

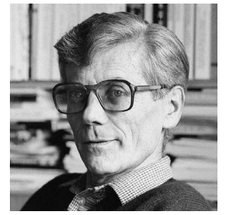
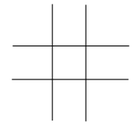
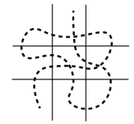


Fig.32: Michel de Certeau, photo



order—authority



disorder—user

Fig.33: Transformation of Place into Space, diagram

Ray Oldenburg

The Great Good Place: Cafes, Coffee Shops, Bookstores, Bars, Hair Salons, and Other Hangouts at the Heart of a Community

"The development of an informal public life depends on people finding and enjoying one another outside the cash nexus."[13]

Between home (the first place) and work (the second place) is the social place, referred to as a third place by Oldenburg. The third place theory celebrates the human as a social animal and signifies the importance of the in between neutral ground where all is free to come and go as they please. Here, a person has the freedom to connect and be a part of the larger community they are situated in and is a psychological need to remain rich with social capital. Oldenburg classifies third places as informal gathering places, as the title of the book suggests—coffee shops, hair salons, and other utilitarian establishments. Scarborough's strip malls are prime exam-



Fig.34: Ray Oldenburg, photo

ples of third places as they congregate many establishments where local communities come to gather, whether after a day's work or on the weekends to meet up with others. The local image prevalent in the strip malls through community oriented signages, products and services have created them as fluid and multifarious places as opposed to the spaces they were imagined when they were constructed in the modernist post war era. Third place characteristics are universal according to Oldenburg—they are neutral grounds and levelers, conversation is the main activity, they embrace fluid accessibility and accommodation, they form the regulars, they take on a low profile, their mood is playful, and they offer psychological respite of a home but away from a home. Akin to these qualities, Scarborough's strip malls embrace all people while maintaining an unassuming presence, allowing the shop owners and customers to create foundational relationships that benefit community members psychologically and physically. This organic social capital offered by the strip malls can be spatially capitalized by creating designated spaces to gather, indoor and outdoor. Therefore, this thesis celebrates Scarborough's strip malls as a third place and realizes its full third place potential by designing human centred purposeful gathering spaces around the strip mall buildings while improving accessibility to them via active mobility options.[14]

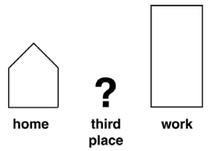


Fig.35: Third Place, diagram

William Hollingsworth Whyte

The Social Life of Small Urban Spaces

"Architects and planners like a blank slate. They usually do their best work, however, when they don't have one. When they have to work with impossible lot lines and bits and pieces of space, beloved old eyesores, irrational street layouts, and other such constraints, they frequently produce the best of their new designs—and the most neighborly."[15]

Through firsthand observations in New York City, Whyte records elements which make an urban space successfully good for people—plaza life, street, and scale. For plaza life, it is essential to have sitting spaces that are preferably moveable or if fixed, needs to be deep. In the latter case, ledges and staircases are informally successful. Exposure to the sun in different levels such as shaded and unshaded is needed for people's enjoyment. Minimized wind drafts increase comfort for people while trees promote a protected and "cuddled" feeling for people. Successful plazas have food vendors as Whyte says, "food attracts people who attract more people". The street edge which connects to a plaza is a crucial moment to hinge public life successfully. This is where people decide to stay or move on and the clash of life between the plaza and the meeting point is a threshold for invitation. The scale is needs to be small as intensified activities welcome people better as the opposite invite the automobile and sparsity which reduce liveliness. Although his observations of successful plaza elements are less methodological than Jan Gehl, Whyte's work is an inspiration for this thesis's design proposal.[16]

Fig.36: William Hollingsworth Whyte, photo

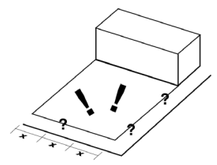


Fig.37: Plaza Life, Street, Scale, diagram

Immigration and Toronto's Population Diversity

Before European colonization, Indigenous peoples lived throughout Canada. The new Dominion of Canada was formed on July 1, 1867, as an amalgamation of British and French settler colonies on lands taken from the Indigenous populations by treaties, usually unfair, and by outright appropriation.[17] Like the addition of provinces for its land mass, Canada's population relied and still relies on addition through immigration to support the economy. Immigration in the 19th century was ostensibly unrestricted but which saw mostly white immigrants to the country. In actuality, discriminatory policies in place like the Chinese Immigration Act between 1923-1940s restricted Chinese immigrants with a head tax, while Jews, Italians and Greeks were viewed as less desirable over Anglo-Saxons and excluded from public life. Between early to mid 20th century, many of the discriminatory immigration practices continued. Events like the Komagata Maru ship carrying Indian Sikhs who were denied entry into Vancouver despite being in the right. Jewish refugees fleeing Nazi Germany on the MS St. Louis were denied entry because of religion.

Post Second World War, Canada's booming economy and changes in mindset in the 1960s gradually led to non-discriminatory immigration laws with the establishment of a points system in 1967 to rank applicants on job skills, education, language, and family connections rather than race, colour, and country of origin. Additionally, Canada agreed to welcome refugees under international conventions and its own programs. With more reforms to the immigration programs over decades to include a wider variety of people from Economic (investors) to Humanitarian (fleeing persecution), Asia replaced Europe as the largest immigrant source in Canada by the 1990s.[18] In 1988 Canada's parliament passed the Multiculturalism Act, symbolically reinforcing the mosaic of cultures and ethnic groups as pluralistic identities within a Canadian society.[19]

The evolution of Canada into a diverse and welcoming country in the latter half of the 20th century and onwards created patterns of complex settlement in immigrant receiving cities like Toronto—post-war migrants, till 1970s, settled in inner cities then moved to suburbs, while post 1970s migrants settled directly into the suburbs.[20] The 2016 Census data show a higher concentration of visible minority population in the east (Scarborough) than the core, central and western areas of Toronto—all these three have a high not a visible minority population.[21] The Census data also show that the recent immigrants into Scarborough are primarily from Asia, not very different from North York, but unlike other parts of Toronto.[22] For median total household income for 2015, the Census 2016 data show that Scarborough has a lower property dollar value than especially Toronto's central artery (downtown and North York) and pockets in the west (Etobicoke).[23] These Census data confirm that Scarborough's population is relatively marginalized compared to the rest of Toronto and that it is home to a working-class population. This marginalized population is the strength as Councillor Michael Thompson says about a community called Wexford Heights in Scarborough that "immigration is a vital demographic and economic lifeline."[24] The creation of the

1. **Indigenous Peoples**
2. **European Colonization**
3. **Immigration Reforms**
4. **Settlement Patterns**

a) Downtown till 1970s— affordable space & cultural resonance

b) Suburbs after 1970s— house ownership, affordable space, & cultural resonance

Fig.38: Scarborough Immigration, diagram

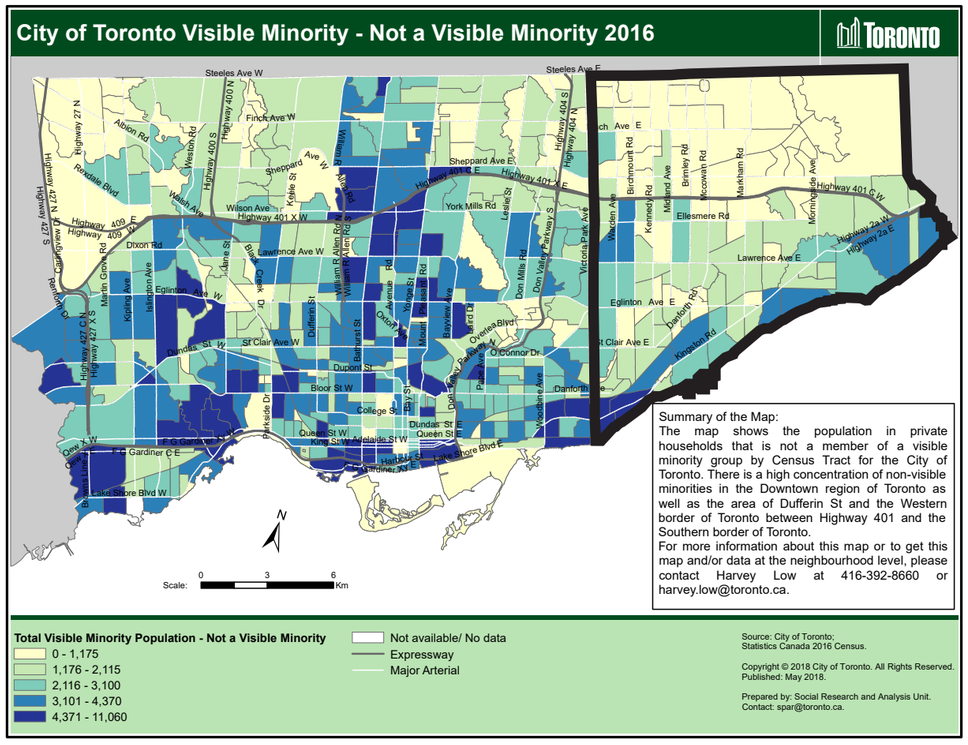


Fig.39: Chinatown; Toronto; 1969, photo



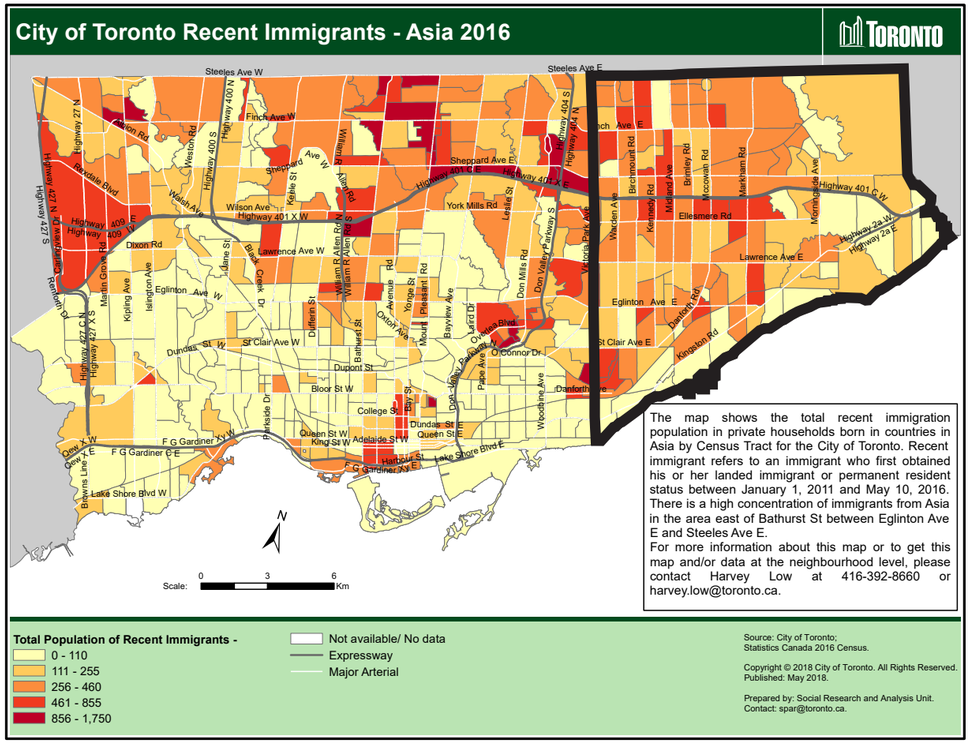
Fig.40: Strip Mall Signage; Scarborough; 2021, photo

vitality visible in the strip malls of Scarborough is possible through the present situation of diverse immigration and Scarborough's embracement of a pluralistic mosaic of ethnocultural retail business landscape akin to its population today.



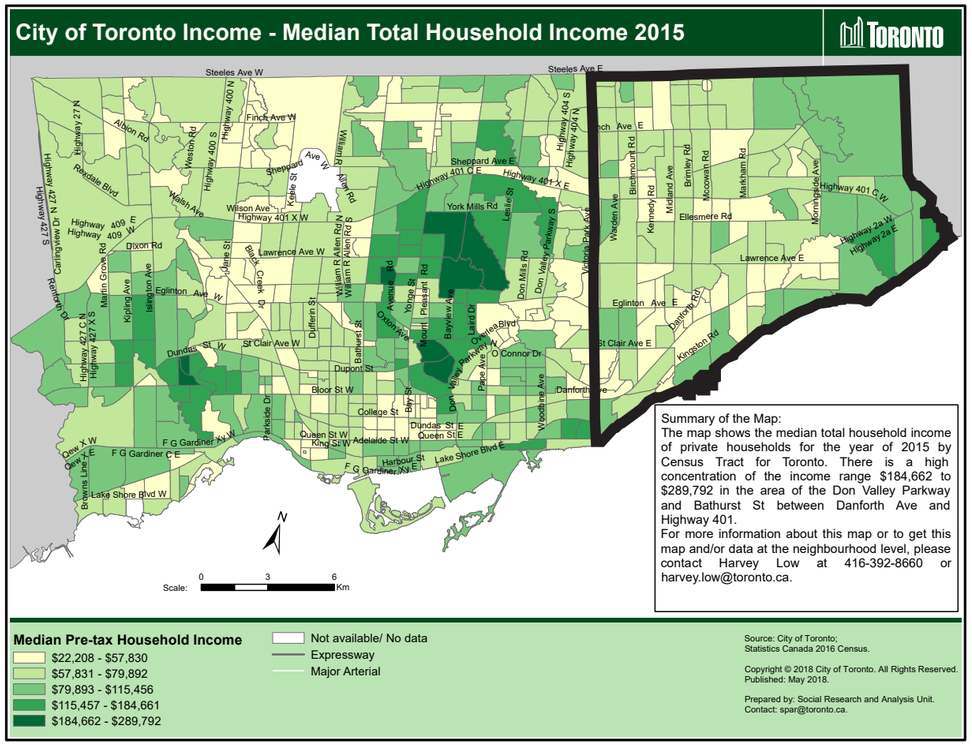
Map from the City of Toronto showing the 2016 Census data of the "Not a Visible Minority" population in Toronto. It is evident that Scarborough—outlined with a black line—primarily contains a minority population compared to the centre and southern west side of Toronto. This implies an uneven demographic condition where Scarborough appears to be more pluralistic than the rest of Toronto, besides the north west part of the city.

Fig.41: City of Toronto Not a Visible Minority; 2016, map



Map from the City of Toronto showing the 2016 Census data of the "Recent Immigrants" into Toronto. It is evident that Scarborough has witnessed a visible influx of immigrants from Asia—not different from the north and north west parts of the city—which is not akin to the central and southern west of the city. As a spatial territory, Scarborough appears to welcome these immigrants primarily, suggesting any existing social infrastructure which is aiding this.

Fig.42: City of Toronto Recent Immigrants—Asia; 2016, map



Map from the City of Toronto showing the 2016 Census data of the "Median Total Household Income" for the 2015 tax year. Scarborough is in the lower end of the income scale—unlike the central area of Toronto—suggesting a working-class demography and implying marginalized spatial conditions in Scarborough compared to the wealthier areas.

Fig.43: City of Toronto Median Total Pre-tax Household Income; 2016, map

Scarborough's Formation

Scarborough is a story of evolutions. Like much of Canada, Scarborough is a city with deep Indigenous roots and a shallower two hundred year European settler history. Unlike many Canadian cities, Scarborough has primarily evolved to become home to a pluralistic working class population.

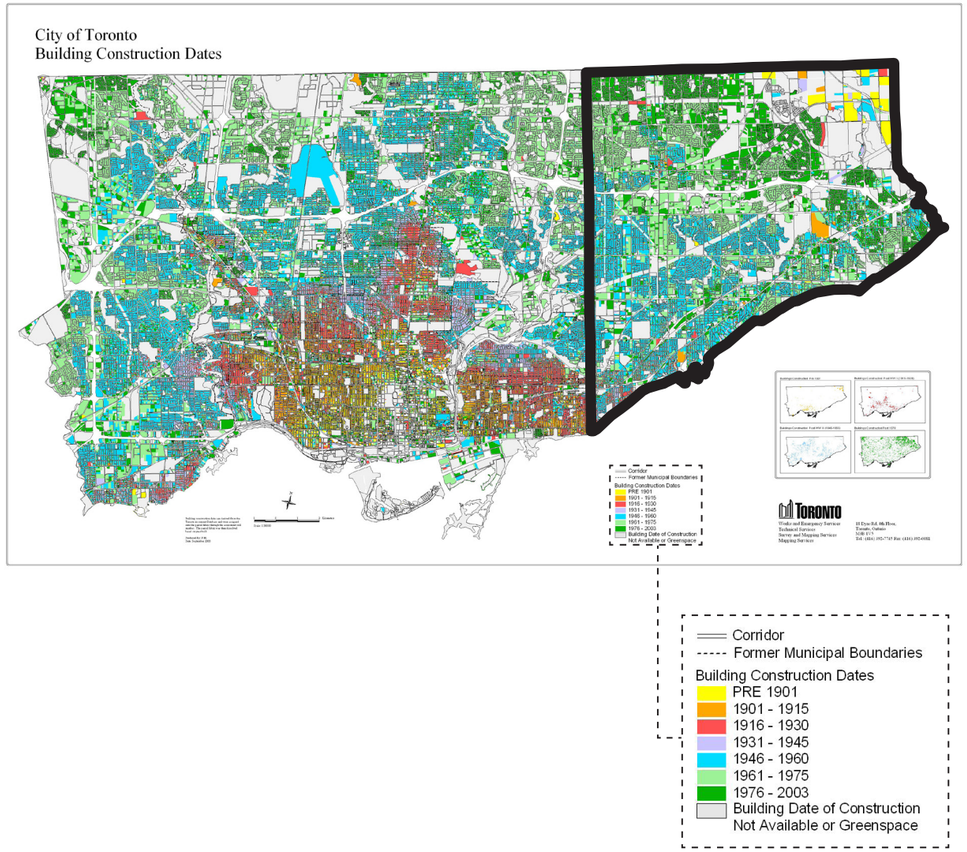
Originally inhabited by First Nations, Mississaugas, Seneca, Haudenosaunee, and the Wendat, for thousands of years, the land on which Scarborough sits on today was a land for living, trading, hunting and travel. The City of Toronto began with the still contested Toronto Purchase from the Indigenous people (Mississaugas of The New Credit) by the British Crown in 1787. Scarborough was not included in it but the British government still operated it as their own territory. In decades, the land fully became settler territory with treaties and nominal payments to the First Nation but not without continued dispute till today.[25]

The first transition to today's Scarborough began when Indigenous people were driven out and the land settled by the Europeans. Initially named Glasgow, the land was renamed to Scarborough in 1793 by the wife of lieutenant government John Simcoe because it reminded her of the cliffs at Scarborough in England. First settled in 1799 by a Scottish couple, the Thomsons, Scarborough was largely a farming community in the 19th and well into the 20th century—only 3711 people lived here in 1900.[26] Communities in Scarborough were rarely properly named such as Wexford, which garnered its identity from a post office. These communities were defined by small churches, perhaps a general store and a train station connecting to York (downtown Toronto today).[27] Scarborough was only a township incorporated in 1850.[28]

The second evolution of Scarborough began with the post Second World War (WW2) suburbanization of the land with industrial opportunities. People migrated from city cores to newly constructed areas on the outskirts—with the help of government funded initiatives—because the pre WW2 economic Depression led to poor living conditions and the need for more space with returning veterans. Additionally, the post war Baby Boom required more space for families—for children there were also new schools. The housing stock included small rapidly constructed wooden homes with lawns and eventually tall concrete slab apartment buildings. Land use zoning was established by the newly powerful municipal planning departments, meaning residential areas were segregated from commercial areas. This caused the single storey, car accessible, strip malls to be constructed on arterial and other main roads. With suburbanization also came the construction of major expressways like the Gardiner Expressway, the Don Valley Parkway and Highway 401 connecting suburbs to city core of Toronto. All these meant that a personal automobile was necessary. The automobile ensured that big signages offered visibility from the roads and parking lots were built into all zoned destinations from strip malls to any place that was newly constructed, and it is still relevant for many buildings constructed today.

People who moved to the suburbs at this time were primarily people of European descent—called the white flight from the city centre—and their vacated places in city centres were filled by new minority immigrants like South Asians.[29] The Golden Mile was an area in Scarborough that produced ammunition for the war but it was transformed with new industrial and commercial buildings. It had the largest shopping plaza in Canada at a time and was surrounded by new residential subdivisions. Later, a new enclosed shopping mall was built as well. Even Queen Elizabeth II visited the mall.[30] Wexford Heights, a community close to Golden Mile, was developed in the post war push and is a typical epitome of the suburban design in Scarborough—long lengths of strip malls on Lawrence Avenue East along with churches and a collection of detached homes in cul-de-sac neighborhoods behind them, all with schools and parks. The strip malls were home to generic independent restaurants and services serving the area—a long standing restaurant called Wexford Restaurant on Wexford Heights Plaza which opened in 1958, permanently closed in 2020 amidst the COVID-19 pandemic.[31] Scarborough itself was formed as a borough in 1967 and an independent city in 1983.[32]

The third and present evolution, began when multiethnic immigration into Canada post points system, and especially after 1970s when immigrants started to settle directly to suburbs rather than the city centre and its vicinity. When the ethnic immigrants like Sri Lankans started to move into Scarborough, the European demography started to move out—inverting the previous suburban white flight.[33] With the possibility of homeownership, previously immigrated ethnic groups who had settled in downtown Toronto moved to Scarborough.[34] Transitional change in demography was also reflected in the retail landscape, primarily in strip malls which offered—and still offer—affordable spaces for small independent ethnic businesses catering to their communities in Scarborough. A pluralistic demography meant that other institutions like mosques and other culture specific institutions started to form. In an article called “The Scarborough Curse”, the author Don Gillmor calls the previous white Scarborough as “Scarberia” combining Scarborough and Siberia while calling today’s evolution as a derogatory name “Scarlem” connotating to the world Harlem as “a mess of street gangs, firebombings and stabbings”.[35] The media is guilty of associating the name of Scarborough with crimes as well—for crimes outside, they only mention the intersection names.[36] In 1998, Scarborough was amalgamated along with East York, York, North York, Etobicoke, and Toronto to form the present City of Toronto.[37] The name Scarborough is today often ridiculed with an image of lower class in the general consensus amongst Torontonians—despite being part of it. Scarborough is marginalized because of a lack of access, properly designed transit and mobility, lack of investment in beneficial public space compared to downtown, and a general stigma of crime associated with this part of Toronto. Growing up in Scarborough, I truly believe, however, that no other city has its diversity and possibilities.



Map from the City of Toronto showing the “Building Construction Dates” from pre 1901 to 2003. In Scarborough, it is evident that the buildings are newer in construction that the central and more wealthier areas. The primary period of construction in Scarborough is between 1946 and 2003, meaning it was formed around the time when suburban sprawl and zoning regulations started to define cities post WW2. Ideas of rapid construction is also implied due to its shorter construction time frame than the Toronto core.

Fig.44: City of Toronto Building Construction Dates; Pre 1901-2003, map

A Scarborough Timeline

Evolution Zero—Indigenous Roots

Living, Trading, Hunting, and Travel.



Fig.45: First Nations for Thousands of Years, diagram

Fig.46: Toronto Purchase;1787, map

Removal of Indigenous Peoples from Scarborough.

Fig.47: Indigenous Peoples Barred, diagram



Fig.48: British Crown Managed Scarborough—Despite Lack of Ownership, image

Evolution One—European Settlement



Fig.49: Scarborough Name from English Town, photo

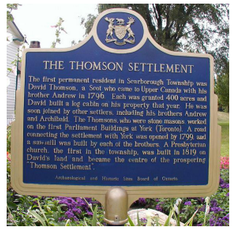


Fig.50: European Settlement —Thomson Couple in 1799, photo



Fig.51: Scarboro Township; 1850, map



Fig.52: Farming Community—19th-20th Century, photo

Evolution Two—Post WW2 Suburbanization



Fig.53: Post-war Housing Shortage and Poor Living Conditions; 1944, image



Fig.54: Rapid Suburbanization—Cul-de-sac Neighbourhoods, Houses, and Apartments, image



Fig.55: Rapid Suburbanization—Arterial Roads, Strip Malls, Big Signages, and Parking Lots, photo



Fig.56: Rapid Suburbanization—Highways, photo

White Flight—Toronto to Scarborough.

Fig.57: White Flight—City Centre to Suburbs, photo



Fig.58: Golden Mile—from Ammunition Factory to Industries and Shopping Centres, photo



Fig.59: Borough in 1967 and Independent City in 1983, map

Evolution Three—Multiculturalism



Fig.60: Points System—Multiculturalism, photo

Migration—to Scarborough.

Fig.61: Post 1970—Immigrant Settlement to Suburbs, diagram

White Flight—Scarborough to Toronto and Other Suburbs.

Fig.62: Inverse White Flight, diagram



Fig.63: Ethnic Shops—Strip Mall and Shopping Centres, photo



Fig.64: Cultural and Religious Institutions, photo



Fig.65: Facade of Lower Class and Crime, web page



Fig.66: Poor Transit—Lack of Subway Coverage and Unreliable Bus Service, photo



Fig.67: Amalgamation of Municipalities into City of Toronto on 1998, map

Direct impact on the formation and present state of Scarborough's strip malls.

Fig.68: Scarborough's Formation, diagram

Public Space in Scarborough

For the purpose of this thesis, and in line with the urban thinkers reviewed earlier in this work, only pluralistic spaces are to be considered as public spaces.

Public spaces in Scarborough are in line with this description above despite not being the classic town square. They are diverse and plural, indoor and outdoor, and formal and informal. Formal indoor public spaces range from city run community recreation centres to indoor shopping malls. These places have systems in place which create controlled interactions. Informal indoor public spaces range from nail salons to takeout restaurants in strip malls. Some of these places have a sense of community building at an urban street level where interactions are celebrated with immediate accessibility. Formal outdoor spaces range from City of Toronto parks and beaches. These spaces, while open to all, are destinations that need trip planning or do not contain a diversity of uses. Informal outdoor spaces range from ravines to hydro corridors. Despite being natural spaces with only utilitarian purposes, these spaces behave like formal outdoor spaces where there aren't immediacy of access and diversity of uses. The problem with Scarborough's public space scene is that there is a lack of fluid or informal places that are celebrated. There is a missing gap of informal public spaces across Scarborough, those like piazzas in Rome or cafes in Paris.

"Towards a Civic Commons Strategy" is a report that looks at strategies to shape placemaking across cities in Canada and mentions that Toronto's suburbs are often excluded from public space proposals. It lists that Toronto's privately owned properties like vacant strip malls and plazas are assets for civic opportunities.[38] In the article "Integrative multiplicity through suburban realities: exploring diversity through public spaces in Scarborough", the authors Ranu Basu, a professor, and Robert Fiedler, a planner, explores how new migrants integrate into Canada through the use of public space that is available to them in the context of Scarborough. Using metaphorical terms—City of Refuge and Peace; City of Memory, Desire and Imagination; City of Multifariousness; and a City of Civic Engagement and Fluid Resistance—the use of public spaces like ethnic grocery shops and youth centres by migrants are described. Privately-Owned Publicly Accessible Spaces (POPS) are open urban spaces created through the negotiation by the city with developers during the application process and are meant to be an addition to other outdoor public spaces. The POPS draft design guideline, based on the City's Official Plan provides direction to the design of these spaces.[39] The majority of these spaces are located in the central Toronto area and the suburban west—only four, small ones, exist in Scarborough. POPS in Scarborough are very poorly designed and seem to only exist as a bare minimum state such as rock on a paved surface with a small trellis at a location in Town Centre Court.[40] David Chariandy's novel *Brother*—set in Scarborough—takes place in a fictional barbershop called Desirae's where Michael and his older brother Francis hang out. Desirae's is an informal social gathering space, a third place, for the brothers and their friends where they



Fig.69: Piazza; Rome, photo



Fig.70: The Strip; Las Vegas, photo



Fig.71: Cafe; Paris, photo



Fig.72: Biergarten; Germany, photo

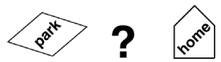


Fig.73: Strip Mall; Scarborough, photo

enjoy music and rehearse for a big concert in downtown—always coming back to this shop as a meeting point, a place of resistance and community building.[41] In her novel *Scarborough*, Catherine Hernandez mark strip malls as places where people of different types interact and gather in their everyday life in a troubled tight knit community located in Scarborough.[42] In "Creating Third Places: Ethnic Retailing and Place-making in Metropolitan Toronto", Zhixi Cecilia Zhuang, an urban planning professor at Ryerson University, studies suburban ethnic business clusters and their role in shaping informal community social spaces. Ethnic retail locations—due to their multiple offerings such as dining, entertainment, and utilitarian services—create community destinations and reflect their local demography. These places of commerce—which create third places—range from strip malls, plazas and indoor shopping malls throughout Scarborough and the Greater Toronto Area. Despite most of the strip malls being in disrepair, Zhixi's article notes that ethnic businesses—South Asian and Chinese in Shepperd East Village BIA in Scarborough—replaced conventional businesses that once occupied those areas and create renewed local economies and informal social destinations by being concentrated and visually unique from the context. Also, Chinese shopping malls are used by elders for social and exercising activities.[43] In a Toronto Star article entitled "Downtown vs. the suburbs: Why Toronto needs to call a truce", Shawn Micallef notes the positive value of suburban strip malls in Scarborough compared to downtown Toronto:

> If these blocks were downtown, they would be beloved stretches. People would flock to them and they would be constantly touted in the media, but because they're behind a few rows of parking, they're dismissed as just another boring part of the suburbs. Watch how people use the strip malls. Some people drive to them, but a lot also have to walk from neighbouring houses and apartment buildings. Despite the fact that they were designed for the car, our postwar suburbs have a lot of people who don't own cars, so they get to their strip malls the way people downtown do: on foot.[44]

Micallef points to the quality of strip malls as public spaces that are quirky but uniquely vibrant and a necessary part for the neighborhoods they exist in, despite their car-oriented design. There is an opportunity to engage with informal indoor public spaces of Scarborough, like strip malls.



informal + accessible public space

Fig.74: Informal Public Space Missing Gap; Scarborough, diagram



Fig.75: Ethnic Clusters as a Destination; Scarborough, photo



Fig.76: Neighbourhood Strip Mall as Informal Destination, Scarborough, photo

Present Situation Forces

The following pages are a sequence of maps showcasing the physical forces which shape the urban fabric of Scarborough at a macro scale in the present situation. These include primary and secondary roads with buildings, parks and green spaces, transit stations, strip malls, BIAs, cycle networks, and private developments. Furthermore, each map layer is visually expanded with sample images or descriptions.

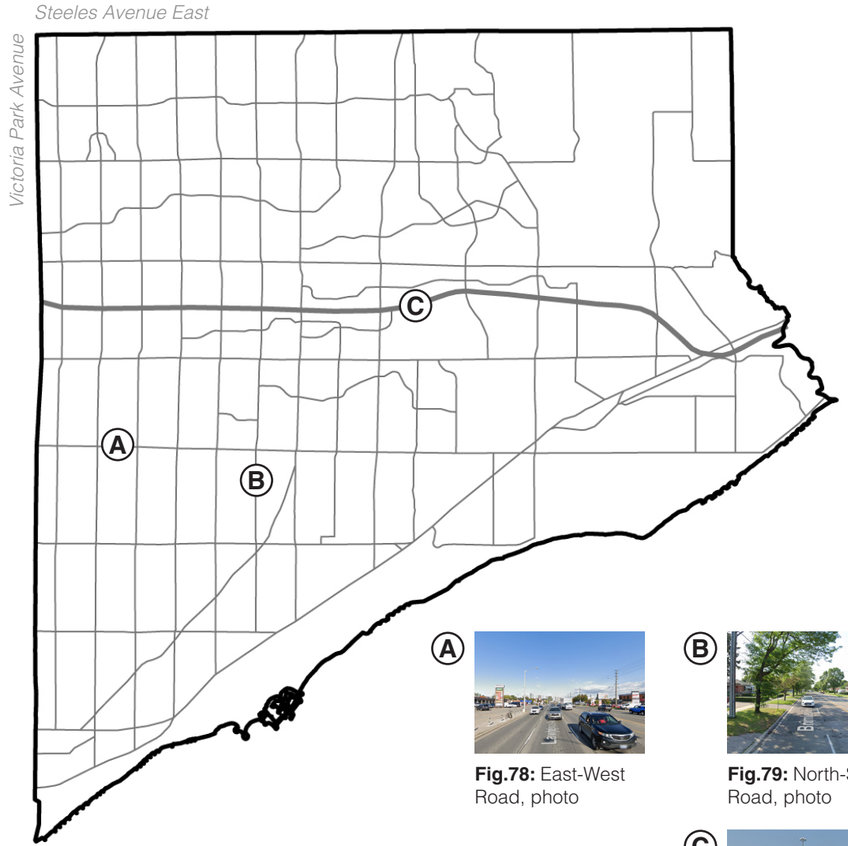


Fig.78: East-West Road, photo

Fig.79: North-South Road, photo



Fig.80: Highway 401, photo

Primary roads are arterial roads fundamentally arranged in a grid running east west and north south with a slight deviation at the south side which follows the shoreline. East-west roads are often wider than north-south roads since they connect to Toronto proper. The thickest line east-west is highway 401.

0 1000 3500 m

Fig.77: Primary Road; Scarborough, map



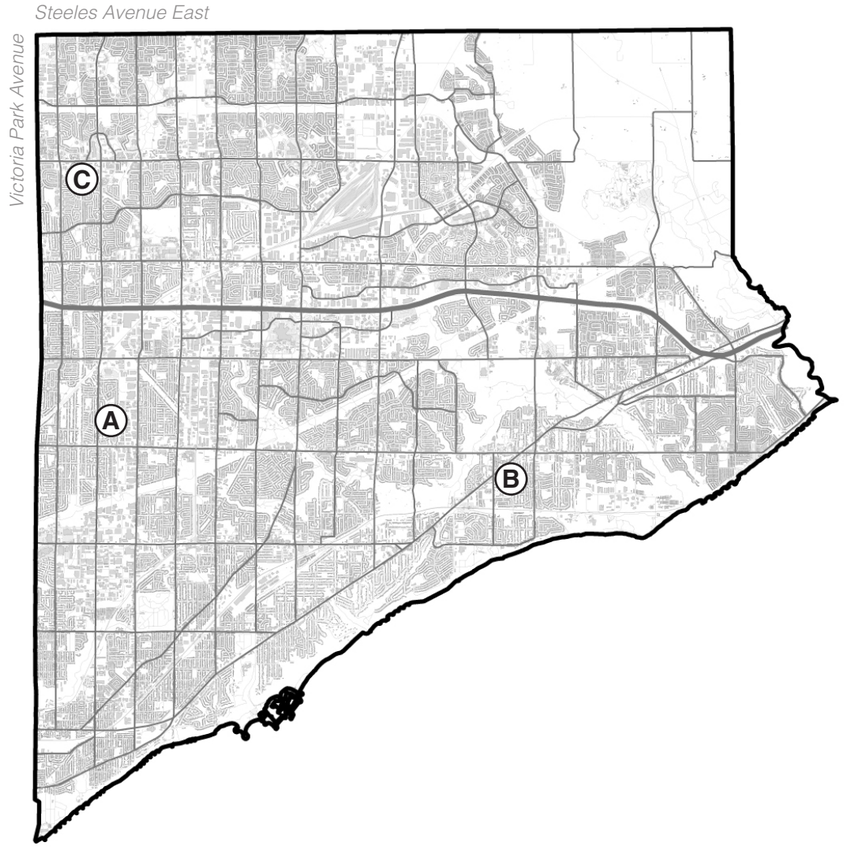
Fig.82: Post-war House, photo



Fig.83: Post-war Apartment, photo



Fig.84: Newer Subdivision House, photo



Secondary roads are neighbourhood cul-de-sac roads breaking from arterials and reaching to residential homes and towers.

0 1000 3500 m

Fig.81: Secondary Road and Building; Scarborough, map

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Fig.86: Institution Associated Park, photo

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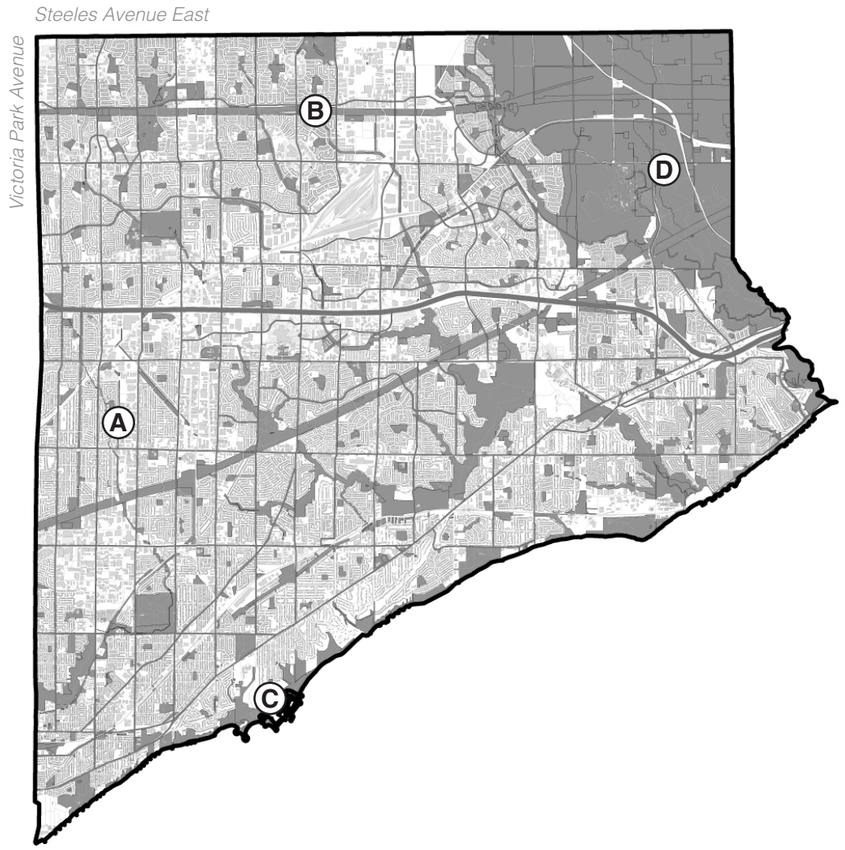
Fig.87: Hydro Corridor, photo

Ⓒ 

Fig.88: Scarborough Bluffs, photo

Ⓓ 

Fig.89: Rouge National Park, photo



While the map shows an abundant amount of green space in Scarborough, a significant portion is attributed to hydro corridors, ravines, and Rouge National Park. Pockets of green spaces are often parks attached to public schools making them encased in neighbourhoods and not easily accessible from the main street.

Fig.85: Park and Green Space; Scarborough, map

Ⓐ 

Fig.91: Scarborough Line, photo

Ⓑ 

Fig.92: Eglinton Line, photo

Ⓒ 

Fig.93: Bloor-Danforth Line, photo



The transit line and stops in this map show the train lines—main subway, the elevated rapid transit and the upcoming Eglinton light rail. These do not cover a large area of Scarborough, hampering fluid mobility in the everyday life. While there are buses on arterial roads, they are unreliable. Today, the rapid transit is being demolished for a reduced stop subway.

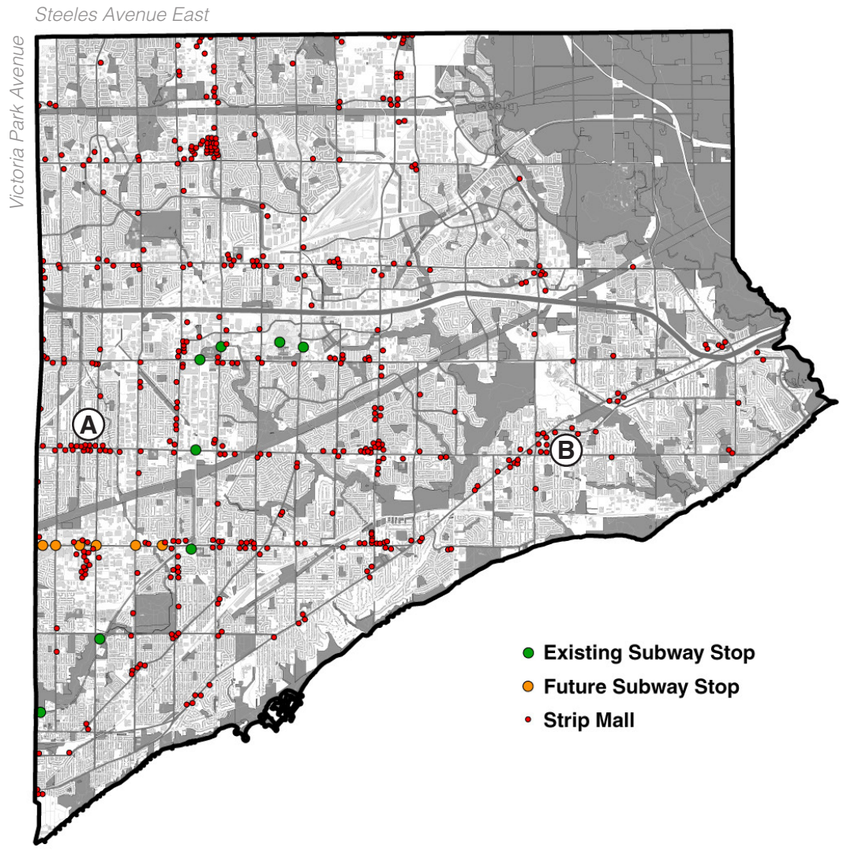
Fig.90: Transit; Scarborough, map



Fig.95: Local Independent Shops, photo



Fig.96: Chain Shops, photo



There are currently 422 strip mall buildings in Scarborough, as shown on this map. These range from one to two stories with either a mixture or singularly independent and chain retail shops. These strip malls exist mainly along the primary arterial roads and often in clusters which make them a lively destination.

Fig.94: 422 Strip Mall Buildings; Scarborough, map

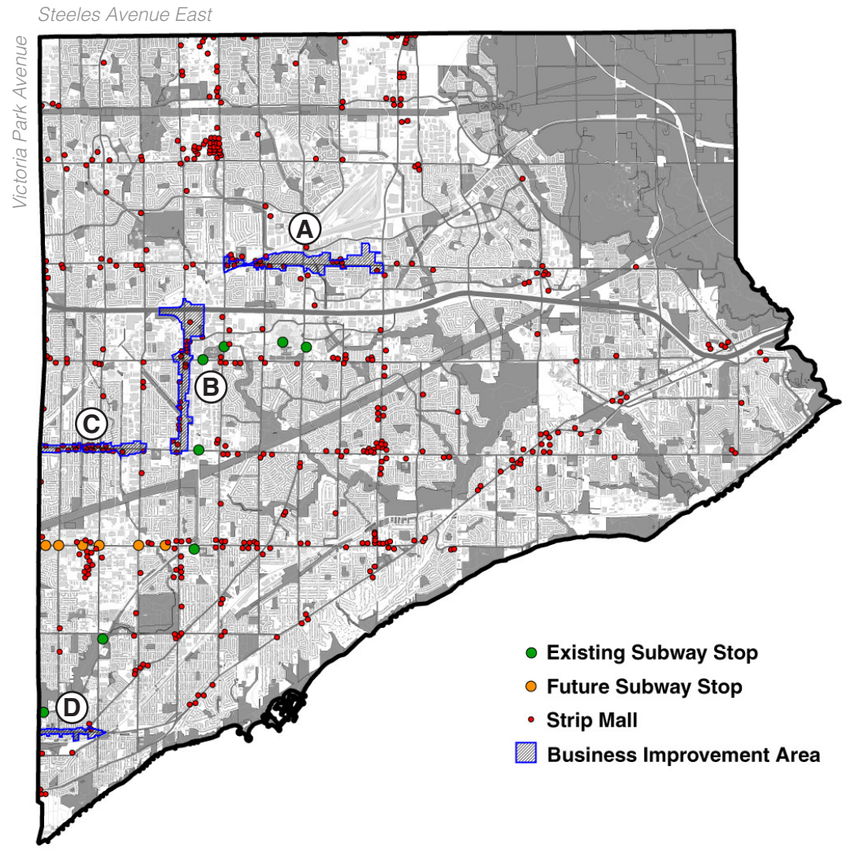
A Sheppard East Village

B Kennedy Road

C Wexford Heights

D Crossroads of the Danforth

Fig.97: BIA List in Scarborough, diagram



There are currently three full BIAs and one partial BIA (Crossroads of the Danforth) in Scarborough. These currently function on their own and do not interact with each other. Like downtown Toronto, there can potentially be more BIAs in Scarborough, given the concentration of diverse strip malls throughout the urban fabric.

Fig.98: Business Improvement Area (BIA); Scarborough, map

Ⓐ 

Fig.100: Temporary Cycle Lane, photo

Ⓑ 

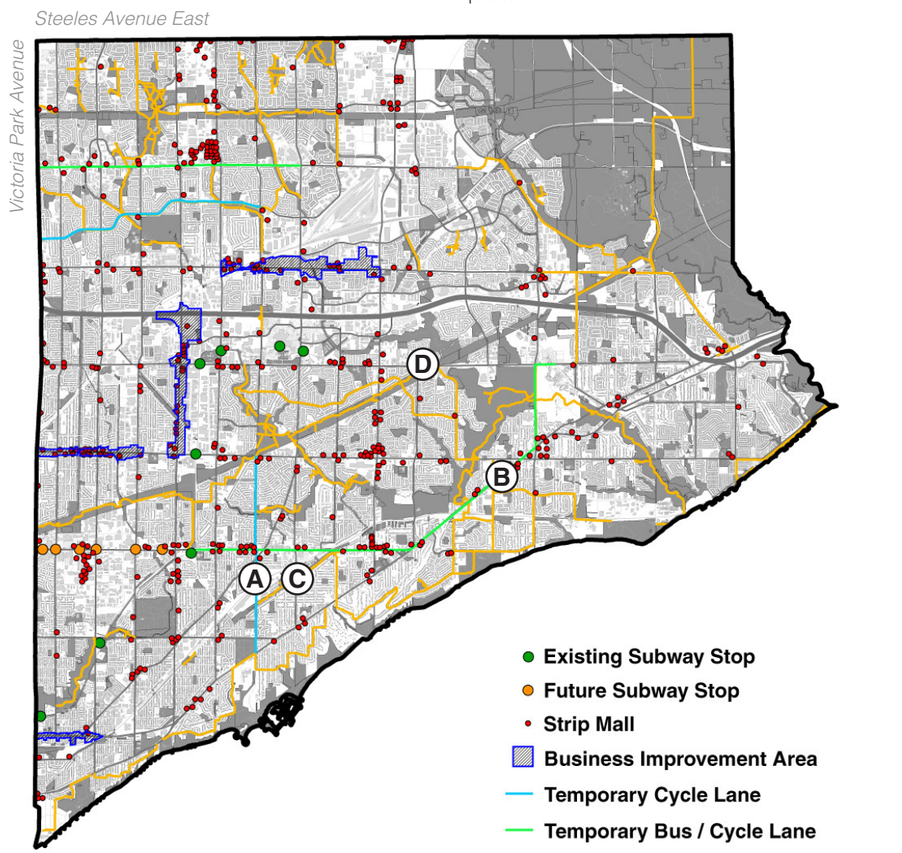
Fig.101: Temporary Bus / Cycle Lane, photo

Ⓒ 

Fig.102: Permanent Vehicle / Cycle / Pedestrian Lane, photo

Ⓓ 

Fig.103: Permanent Cycle Lane, photo



While the map appears to show an extensive amount of cycle lanes, the reality is that they are largely tucked in natural trails or are shared unprotected lanes if they are on the road. In the experience of everyday, these lanes rarely help in assisting Scarborough's residents to run errands or cycle beyond recreation.

Fig.99: Cycle Network; Scarborough, map

Ⓐ 

Fig.105: Condo Development 1, render

Ⓑ 

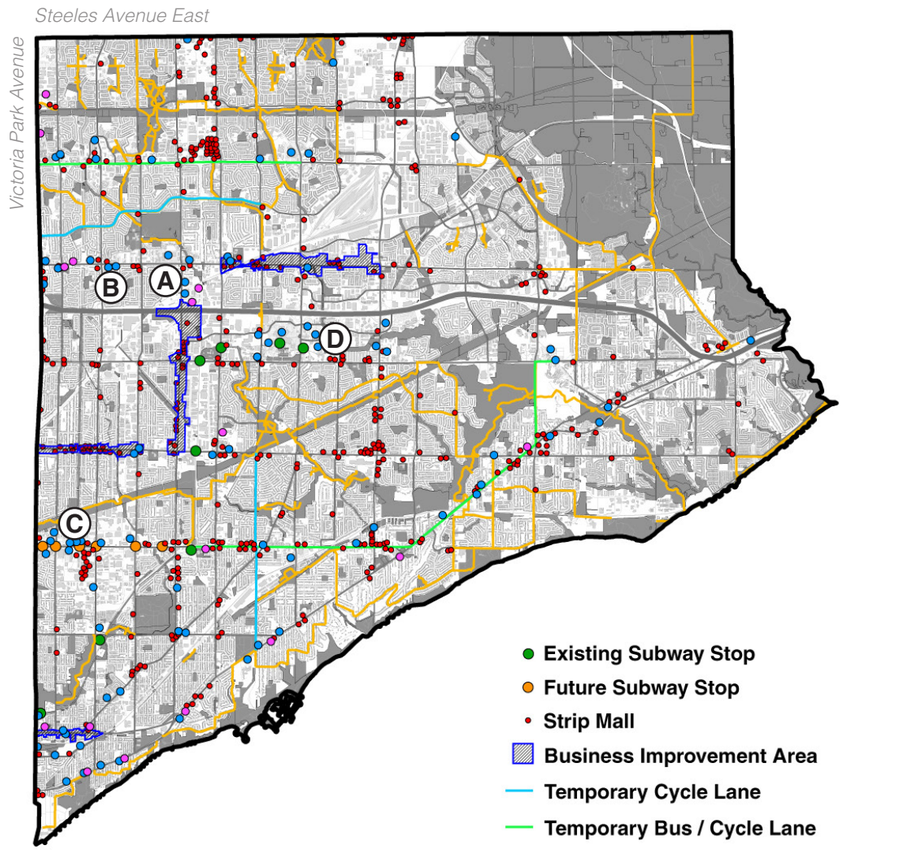
Fig.106: Condo Development 2, render

Ⓒ 

Fig.107: Condo Development 3, render

Ⓓ 

Fig.108: Condo Development 4, render



This map shows private developments, which are only for-profit residential or mixed-use projects from townhouses to tower-podium condominiums. While projects are always in flux, this instance captures a rough moment from 2020. The pattern for these projects can involve demolishing low density buildings like strip malls, infused with transit like the upcoming Eglinton Crosstown LRT.

Fig.104: Private Development; Scarborough, map

Strip Malls in Scarborough

Strip malls particular to this thesis discussion can be elaborated with specific topics—origination, typology, shops, and spatial quality. Strip malls are the post Second World War era commercial buildings that were cheaply constructed for quick efficiency—fast in-and-out shopping catered to the automobile of a new suburban era. Over time with renewed immigration policies in Canada and time, these strip malls are now in a new paradigm—they are spatially and aesthetically run down, yet they are increasingly vital since they provide affordable uncontrolled spaces for marginalized ethnic and independent retail businesses. As a space they provide essential services and goods to their locale in an organic way, despite often being visual eyesores. The thesis argument moves as follows in relation to the building type.



Fig.109: Strip Mall Situation, diagram

Origination and Evolution of the Building Type

Strip malls—also known as mini malls in some parts of the U.S. like Los Angeles (LA)—has their origination linked to the first drive in market in Glendale, LA, called the Ye Market Place, which opened in 1924.[45] This was innovative because with the advent of cheaper automobiles, like the Ford Model T, the customers' cars were accommodated with the front facing parking lot and the shops receded back organized in a courtyard U format.[46] When gas stations were closing due to the OPEC crisis in 1973, station sites at busy intersections were demolished to make way for the first strip mall or mini mall in Panorama City, LA. With that, the popularity of mini malls skyrocketed and more locations opened in LA.[47] The creation of strip malls in American style post war urban planning can be traced back to Ye Market Place.[48] After the Second World War, when soldiers were returning home, there was a need for affordable housing and a general desire for cleaner more efficient cities outside of the older city centres. Quick mass-produced schemes were necessary to accommodate the housing need which became synonymous with the middle class—the suburbs.



Fig.110: Ye Market Place; Los Angeles; 1920s, photo

The use of American style Modernist planning in Canada is evident in Scarborough—houses with big lawns and driveways with automobile centric urban planning like wide roads and zoning of city uses. Zoning in particular gave rise to the strip mall on arterial and other main roads—as a segment to the retail zone serving the residential areas—which was away from the main street pedestrian friendly typology.[49] As a building form, they are typically one to two stories in height with parking lots backed from main roads. Toronto's first strip mall, known as Sunnybrook Plaza, was located on Bayview Avenue and Eglinton Avenue East in the Leaside area between 1952 to 2020. It fell to accommodate density and a light rail transit (LRT) station for the Eglinton line.[50] This was among the first automobile-oriented shopping centres in Canada.[51] Places like these are filled with nostalgia for the local residents who use them despite



Fig.111: Scarborough's Zoning; map

being simple buildings only designed to sell everyday goods—typically anchored by a grocery or departmental store. Indoor malls were in rise in a decade after the 1960s, like the Yorkdale Shopping Centre in North York. Unlike strip malls which were local, enclosed malls were catering to larger regional audiences since they were nearer to expressways. [52] In the 1980 and 1990s, strip malls were the antithesis to larger indoor malls—they offered lower rents which attracted mom-and-pop businesses for local needs.[53] The two-storey strip mall in Toronto is a result of the strong restrain from the regional council to suburban growth beyond Metro Toronto.[54] Post-war immigrant groups during 1945-1970s typically settled in inner city areas of Toronto, then moving to suburbs as they become more established, but the newer groups arriving after 1970s settled directly to suburban areas as the white flight of the 1950s reversed due to central city gentrification.[55] This made the city centres too costly for the new immigrant working class. This created complex patterns on the suburban retail landscape, like in strip malls. They evolved to become microcosms of the world by catering merchandise to the new evolving multicultural pluralistic communities.[56]



Fig.112: Sunnybrook Plaza; Toronto; 1952, photo

Strip Mall Typology

In the journal article "Beyond Aesthetics: Assessing the Value of Strip Mall Retail in Toronto", Orly Linovski, a professor at University of Manitoba, created a diagram comparing the scale of different retail spaces—main street, strip mall, plaza, big box centre, and shopping mall. Main Street buildings exist primarily in downtowns. These buildings front the street and only a sidewalk separates them from the roads and streets. Sometimes they contain surface parking at the rear, meant for the shopkeepers. These buildings, like strip malls, host independent mom-and-pop businesses. Since they are not catered to the automobile—they do not have front customer parking, only on street paid parking—they celebrate the pedestrian life. In Toronto, the building itself are shaped like multi storey slots of space, the bottom is retail and upper floors are residential or small offices. Strip malls, like main street buildings, contain conjoined stores in a long strip and are often parallel to the road. Strip malls differ from the main street in that they contain free front and sometimes rear surface parking lots for the customers and shopkeepers.

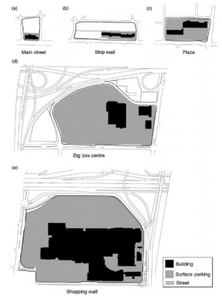


Fig.113: Retail Typology; Toronto; diagram

They dominate suburban arterial roads as neighborhood commercial retail spaces playing the theme of the automobile right into the building space with its parking in front. Such parking is often allocated to each shop, ranging from two to three spaces—this is unlike a plaza which has larger parking spaces. These strip malls became the preferred post Second World War type.[57] In a Canadian context, the terms strip malls and plazas are used interchangeably, despite being spatially different. Today, there are strip malls that are larger in size and often contain large chain enterprises. These are newly constructed buildings that combine larger parking lots than post war type while maintaining a so-called strip form with higher ceilings and sometimes more elaborate facades. There are also newly

constructed strip malls of this fashion that are of certain ethnic types forming ethnic enclaves.[58] Plazas contain larger parking spaces and can be anchored by a larger retail shop like a grocery. The buildings can be in more than one part, appearing less like a row of shops. Plazas as a whole can take up larger sites than strip malls due to the additional parking spaces and the deeper building depth on their sites. Plazas sometimes are not necessarily parallel to the main road either. In Scarborough, named strip malls often carry the word plaza at the end, for example, Wexford Heights Plaza on Lawrence Avenue East and Warden Avenue. Big box centres, the most recent shopping type to emerge in the 1980s, are standalone buildings with very high ceilings that accommodate often chain shops that sell or serve variety of things indoor, for many people at a time. Examples of big box centres include Walmart and Costco. The large building is surrounded by a large area of parking and sometimes other big box centres as well. These define twenty first century suburbs throughout Canada and are the largest growing retail type in Canada.[59] Lastly, shopping malls, which emerged early in the post war period, are an enclosed arena for retail spaces ranging from movie theatres to high end retail stores and also have a large area for surface parking. Shopping malls are not frequently sited since they are reliant on customers from proximal and far distances. Unlike shopping malls and big box centres, the strip mall and plaza focus more on local neighborhood needs in the suburbs since the main street primarily caters to the downtown. For the purpose of discussing strip malls in this thesis, plazas and strip malls are understood to be strip malls because in reality, their difference is hard to decipher visually and experientially—and to respect the local Canadian culture of interchangeably using the same terms together for both spaces.



Fig.114: Strip Mall—Big Box Stores; Scarborough; 2021, photo



Fig.115: Strip Mall—New Renovation; Scarborough; 2021, photo



Fig.116: Strip Mall—Post-war Plaza; Scarborough; 2021, photo

Shops

In Scarborough, strip malls host a variety of shops ranging from restaurants, grocery stores, and drycleaners to clothing, nail salons, and barbershops. As such they are essential local destinations. They also contain religious uses—with ethnic connections—like a Pakistani Islamic learning centre and a Filipino church.[60] Many of the shops also have some ethnic connotation to them for example, clothing shops sell sari and Lebanese restaurants are beside Sri Lankan restaurants which are next to Jamaican restaurants.[61] The second floor also sometime contain offices like diverse language tax preparers and tutors. The reason for diverse ethnic offerings is due to Scarborough being a landing pad for immigration and this present situation makes strip malls a pluralistic community destination for variety of utilitarian and discretionary uses.



Fig.117: Strip Mall—Post-war One Storey; Scarborough; 2021, photo



Fig.118: Strip Mall—Post-war Two Storey; Scarborough; 2021, photo

Spatial Quality, Traffic and Access

In Scarborough today, post Second World War strip mall buildings

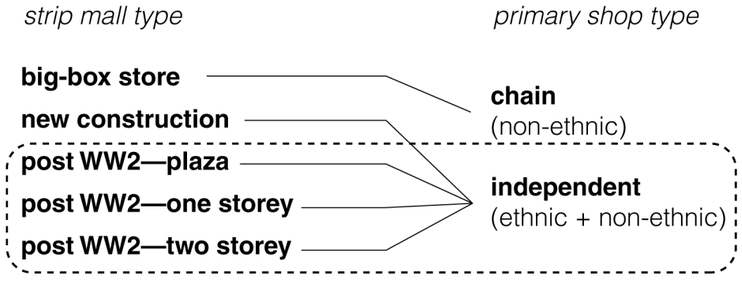
are typically one to two storey tall—the first story being commercial and the second floor being residential and/or commercial. The buildings are made of concrete or wooden walls with steel open web steel joist supporting the flat roof. Some have entrance canopies made of concrete and held by thin and round steel columns. The storefront entrances generally comprise a glass door along with a large glazing—all with aluminum mullions. The second floor often contain a small sliding operable window. Brick is often used for the façade. The shop signages are directly above the width of the space and are all lined linearly across the whole façade—often multilingual signages are seen with bright back lights. Neon lights are also popular in the storefronts. Often there are rear parking spaces with exits from the building and garbage storage for the businesses. The parking lot asphalt is many times in disrepair and these spaces are often lit only by the signage lights—the parking spots are often faintly marked on the asphalt badly needing a repainting. Today, these buildings are old and their age is certainly visible with leaky roofs, dated material specifications, and their linear form with single use storefronts. These strip malls were cheaply made with the most basic structures and materials in a linear box form. Additionally, these spaces often lack proper maintenance. They were never made for longevity and the fundamental nature of a tight monetary situation in these independent businesses make it that way. Layers of uses are evident when entrances are marked with old, glued posters and new signages are places on top of previous signages. The shops inside often appear to be permanently ad hoc, with menus that are long with poor graphics. Aroma from a variety of ethnic food is often prevalent since generally there is at least one food establishment in every strip mall. Generally, the spaces of these post war strip malls in Scarborough are architecturally low quality—despite providing essential products and services to their customers.



Fig.119: Strip Mall—Rear Parking Quality; Scarborough; 2020, photo



Fig.120: Strip Mall—Parking Lot Asphalt Quality; Scarborough; 2020, photo



This thesis is only interested in post WW2 strip malls. These generally are of three types, plaza, one storey and two storey. Plazas are a bit larger than classic "strip malls" as they take up a whole block and have larger and looser allocation of parking spaces for each shop. Plazas are deeper than strip malls. Strip mall with one or two storey comprise partial blocks with lesser amount of parking space than a plaza. The primary shop type in all three of these are independent ethnic and non-ethnic shops due to their affordability and lack of a strict central system.

Fig.121: Strip Mall Types and Primary Shop Types, diagram

Urban Vitality

Scarborough's strip malls create vitality and can be understood with their provisions—independent mom-and-pop businesses, ethnocultural mark making, culinary scene, and Business Improvement Area (BIA). Vitality is a condition of resiliency and evolution, exhibited well by Scarborough's independent retail businesses. Being the centre for neighborhood shopping needs, the informal interaction build social capital within communities throughout this part of Toronto. Much like bustling streets in downtown Toronto, Scarborough's vital street life is created by its strip malls. While newer spaces invite larger chain shops, often the unsightly strip malls in Scarborough—due to their affordable rent or ownership cost—incubate the independent and ethnic entrepreneurial retail shops directly catering to the demography they are situated in, while being part of the local economic and social network. Following is an examination of that vitality.

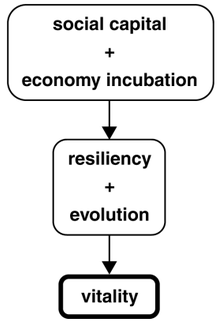


Fig.122: Vitality, diagram

Independent Mom-and-Pop Businesses

Strip malls are the last remaining spaces for independent mom-and-pop businesses to exist because the malls offer affordable retail spaces in a lack of centrally control. Business competition is allowed unlike indoor malls. People depend on them despite their derelict spatial quality.[62] When new neighborhood developments welcome chain stores, gentrification can displace these existing independent shops. A Toronto Star article entitled, "The strip mall is the final outpost of independent commerce in Toronto", notes:

> It's one specific story that mirrors a long-emerging trend in Toronto: as more and more traditional, trendy main street strips become dominated by multinational chain stores and high-end boutiques, the really interesting, independent, quirky joints are more often found in the aging, ugly and mostly unloved strip plazas, the kind of places that dominate the city's streets in Scarborough, Etobicoke, York and much of East York and North York.[63]

The aging ugly strip malls are not celebrated for their creation of vitality—hosting local entrepreneurial shops. Yet, the interesting downtown streets are labelled with gentrified inauthentic and expensive shops. According to the Government of Canada "Key Small Business Statistics"—2020, small businesses—between 1-99 people—contributed 41.9% to Canada's gross domestic product (GDP).[64] Small retail businesses are vital to Canada's economy and need to be celebrated. In the foreword of the book *Small Business and the City: The Transformative Potential of Small-scale Entrepreneurship*, Councillor Michael Thompson of Ward 37 Scarborough Centre, says that "[o]ur small businesses and the locations they occupy on our many streets and avenues form an integral part of this country's social fabric and community spirit." Small businesses are part of local economies by being integral to supply chains, job opportunities and

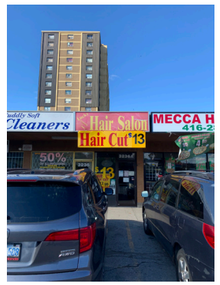


Fig.123: Independent Mom-and-Pop Businesses—Cheap Haircut; Scarborough; 2020, photo



Fig.124: Independent Mom-and-Pop Businesses—Halal Burger; Scarborough; 2020, photo

non-profit contributions that ultimately create resiliency and better quality of life for the local communities they are situated in. These businesses actively build social capital with their service to local communities. As an example, Thompson says that "[t]he community of Wexford, in particular, with its collection of small businesses, is the ultimate microcosm of Canada's economy ...." and "[i]n a world seemingly dominated by chain stores and corporate fast-food giants, Lawrence Avenue East and Kennedy Road stand as unique bastions of independent entrepreneurialism and eclecticism." Despite these shops existing in derelict strip malls, Thompson says on the Wexford Heights strip malls that "[y]et these are not stagnant period pieces but dynamic and evolving structures reflecting the ebbs and flows of demographic change and economic transformation." Somehow the influx of immigrants and the affordability of spaces in strip malls created a vital condition of local entrepreneurship that makes the Wexford Heights community a story of resiliency.[65] If rents increase due to new developments in communities like Wexford Heights, independent mom-and-pop shops will be driven away to make way for large chain shops with no integrated part to the local communities. This sort of gentrification can ruin the organic vitality and diversity provided by the current shops, so, the current state of independent retail condition need to be celebrated—by directing more exposure to them—before they start disappearing.



Fig.125: Independent Mom-and-Pop Businesses—Convenience Shop; Scarborough; 2020, photo

Ethnocultural Mark Making

The term Ethnoburb was coined by Wei Li and it means "suburban ethnic clusters of residential areas and business districts in large metropolitan areas, ethnoburbs are multiethnic communities in which one ethnic minority group has a significant concentration but does not necessarily constitute a majority."[66] Scarborough has evolved to an ethnoburb with its pluralistic demography and is visually evident in the demography and spatial character of the strip mall stores. While there are large enclosed Chinese malls like Dragon Centre and Pacific Mall, strip malls throughout Scarborough carry the distributed tapestry of pluralistic ethnic commerce. Ethnic expressions like multilingual signages, displays of ethnic services or products and distribution of ethnic newspapers in grocery stores reinforce authentic placemaking qualities. Additionally, concentration or clusters of ethnic retail shops become place markers.[67] Skycity Shopping Centre on Finch Avenue East and Midland Avenue in Scarborough is primarily a strip mall with Asian shops, not unlike those in its vicinity of the Agincourt area—reflecting the area's demography. Familiar goods in stores help to sustain ethnic languages and cultures.[68] Despite appearing like eyesores at times—the diverse ethnocultural offerings in strip malls make the spaces worth going to, from my personal experience as a user. With ethnic retail offerings like sari, spices, grocery, restaurant, bakery, barbershop amongst others, memories from home countries satisfy the local demography of Scarborough—altering poor architecture design into meaningful experiences.



Fig.126: Sri Lankan Clothing Shop; Scarborough; 2021, photo



Fig.127: Chinese Strip Mall; Scarborough; 2021, photo

Culinary Scene

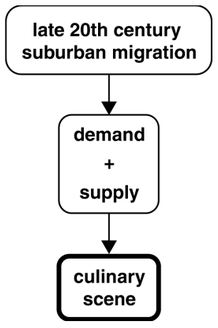
The culinary scene of Scarborough is underrated. Home to a multi-ethnic population, the availability of food in Scarborough represents its demography. But somehow, despite the great variety and offerings, Scarborough is always in the shadow of Toronto's downtown food scene. After a tour with University of Toronto Scarborough representatives, Tyler Cowen, an American economist, wrote in a Marginal Revolution blog post entitled "Is Scarborough, Ontario the dining capital of the world?" that "Scarborough is the best ethnic food suburb I have seen in my life, ever, and by an order of magnitude and it sparked a debate in the comment sections.[69] The nature of the opposition from a simple blog post shows the lack of acclamation for the low-key, yet rich food scene in Scarborough. Late twentieth century migration of new kinds of immigrants to Scarborough like Asians, created a place-specific diasporic landscape of food. As an example, Agincourt in Scarborough have emerged as a dynamic Chinese culinary destination with restaurants and supermarkets. The retail offerings create an aura of a Chinese presence through food. Besides Agincourt, it is also evident on Lawrence Avenue East at Wexford Heights that there is a cluster of Arabian shops offering ethnic cuisines that cater to the local and outside population. Very popular shawarma places exist here like takeout only Shawarma Empire in a tiny humble shop within a strip mall, catering to long customer line ups—existing for at least two decades. As such, the article posits that Scarborough contains hubs "where diasporic culinary infrastructures overlap to create site-specific food culture and sensescape."[70] These infrastructure of food mean the demand and supply created by immigration, for example, strip mall grocery store serves the need to cook ethnic food at home by diasporas so they mentally map out a network of ethnic destinations over chain shops. University of Toronto Scarborough created a food related research lab in 2014 called Culinaria Research Centre and have studied Scarborough's food scene—revealing that its immigrant receiving character helped establish itself as a diversely rich culinary destination.[71] Many of these culinary establishments exist in strip malls throughout Scarborough. Strip malls are a microcosm of community because they provide affordable rent or ownership cost and there is a need to celebrate areas that do not receive enough credit, like Scarborough. The food scene in Scarborough is created by the bottom category of immigrants in the late twentieth century, like Blacks and Asians. Suresh Doss, a CBC food blogger who reports on delicious food destinations throughout Scarborough, notes that the low rents offered by strip malls are essential to the survival of these local establishments and there is an informal cross-cultural exchange through these culinary establishments.[72]



Fig.128: Sri Lankan Grocery Shop; Scarborough; 2020, photo



Fig.129: Syrian Sweet Shop; Scarborough; 2021, photo

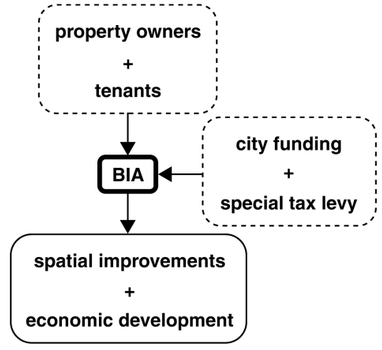


Ethnic migration to Scarborough created the demand for specialty cooking ingredients and tastes which made new food establishments to sprout up in strip malls to supply those demands rapidly.

Fig.130: Culinary Scene, diagram

Business Improvement Area (BIA)

Business Improvement Area (BIA) according to the City of Toronto is "made up of commercial and industrial property owners and their non-residential tenants who join together under a volunteer Board of Management (BIA Board) to carry out improvements and promote economic development within their designated area."[73] BIA are legally designated in chapter 19 of Toronto Municipal Code and comes with many benefits that promote resiliency—access to city established funding to improve matters like streetscapes and organizational unity of businesses create a destination identity to increase individual business revenue.[74] Chapter 19 dictates all rules and regulations related to BIAs in terms of boards, financial requirements, loans, and so on.[75] BIAs are directed by BIA boards and are responsible for maintenance and beautification of municipal owned land in BIA, promote the BIA as a destination for commerce and entertainment, police the area to prevent crime, address issues, and advocate on behalf of BIA interests. The city imposes a special tax levy for the properties within a BIA to fund its operation and the city contributes a portion for projects, like streetscaping, managed by the BIAs. There are many financial incentives that are dedicated to the BIAs by the City of Toronto. There are 83 BIAs currently in the City of Toronto with most of them being in the downtown core and three complete and one partial BIAs in Scarborough.[76] There are many BIA initiatives that are meant to attract people to them. Taste of Lawrence is an annual multi day food and cultural event hosted by Wexford Heights BIA in Scarborough. The vibrant festival takes place on a portion of Lawrence Avenue East—the road is closed off from automobiles—to host food stalls from around the world with live music and rides which invite people from way beyond the local area.[77] Wexford Heights BIA also placed banners on streetlights and planters throughout the street to create a more welcoming environment. Other Toronto BIAs with main street buildings like the Junction BIA and Willowdale BIA amongst many others, participated in Cafe-TO, a city program that allows on street protected dining in their own creative ways.[78]



Each BIA is a locally collective organization through which funding and management improve public life and business conditions.

Fig.131: Business Improvement Area (BIA), diagram



Fig.132: Sheppard East Village BIA; Scarborough, photo



Fig.133: Wexford Heights BIA; Scarborough, photo

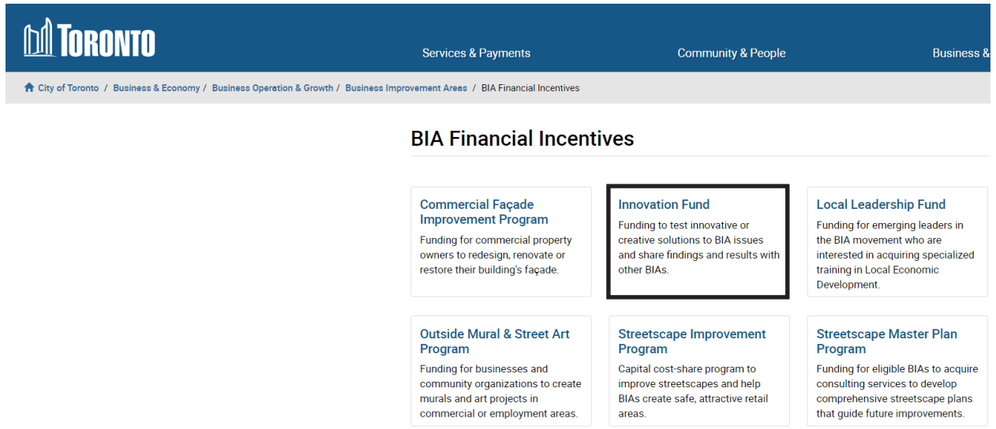


Fig.134: BIA Financial Incentives, web page

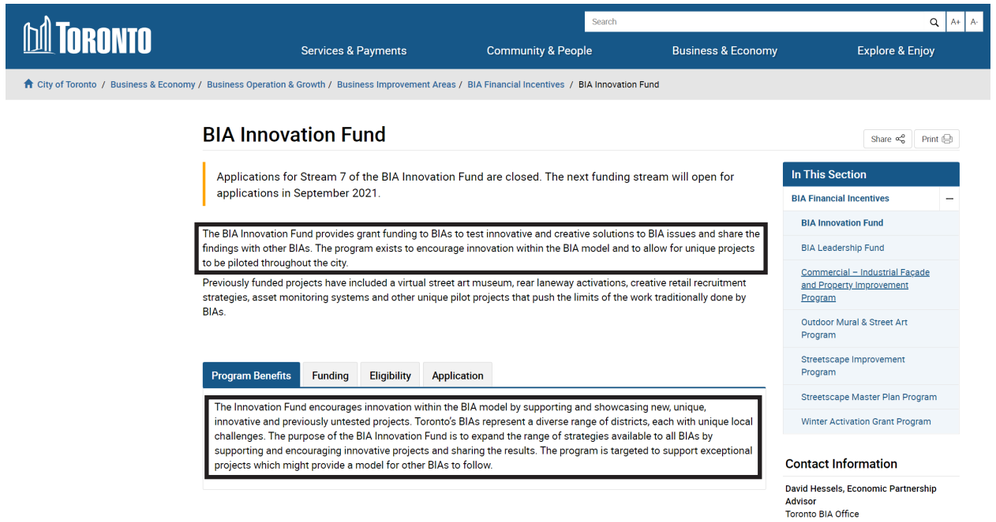


Fig.135: BIA Innovation Fund, web page

Among many of the annual BIA funding initiatives like streetscape improvements and street art program, the "Innovation Fund" can be used to create spatial pilot projects as a test case to share with other BIAs.

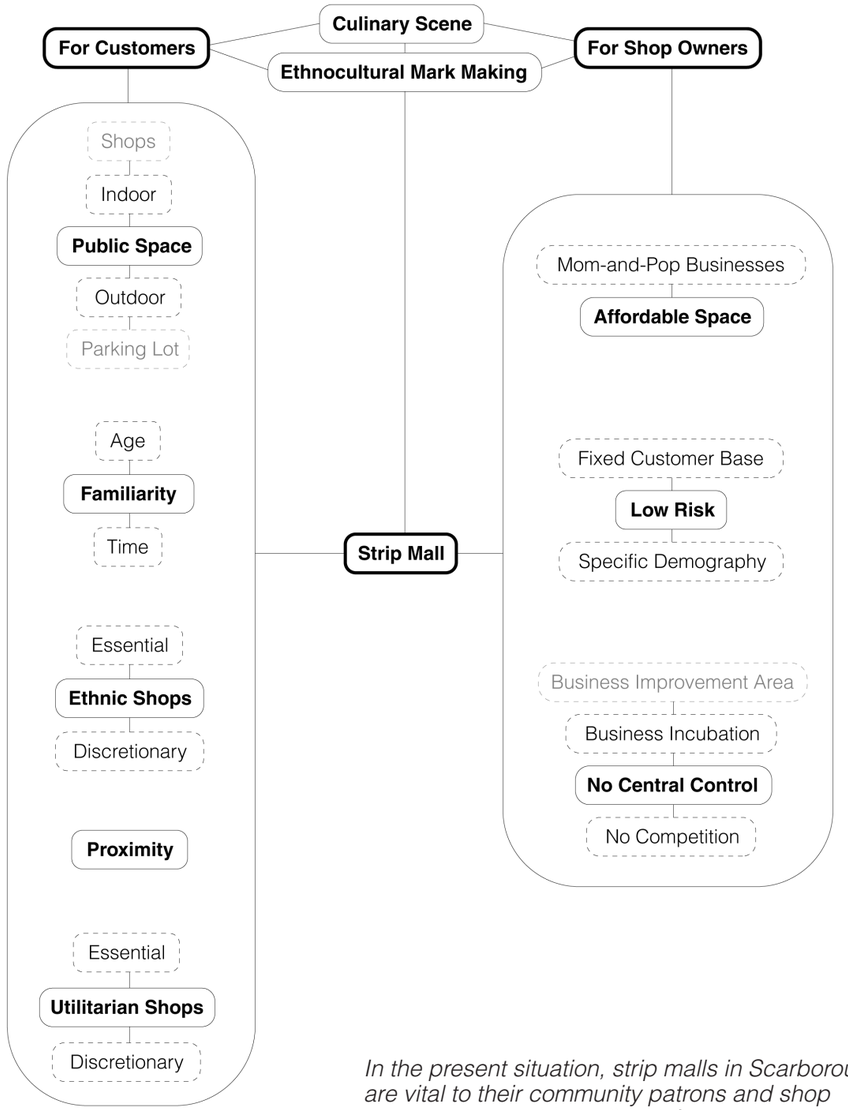


Fig.136: Vitality Elaboration, diagram

In the present situation, strip malls in Scarborough are vital to their community patrons and shop owners who symbiotically reinforce this vitality in a continuous loop.

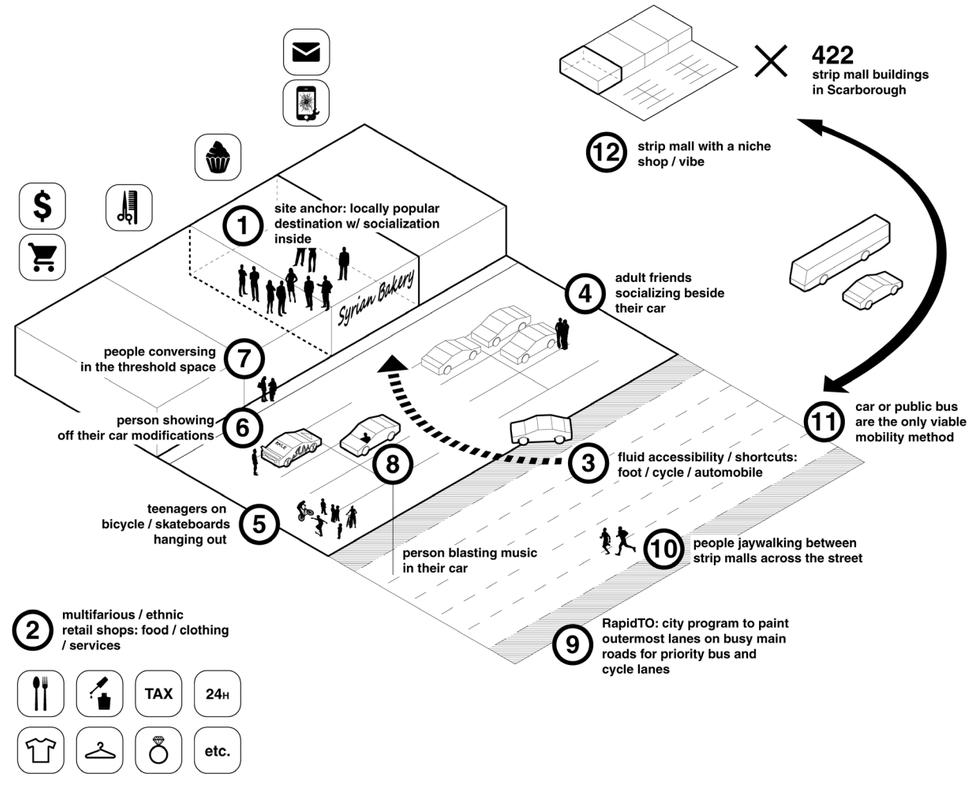
Narratives of Public Life

The public life in Scarborough's strip malls is often vibrant—maybe just not all at once. Their position in the city fabric and spatial features make them a place where informal gathering is welcomed at all times. Strip malls are a part of the everyday life for Scarborough's communities, and all are welcome at all times of the day. A thesis narrative called "A Summer Evening at the Strip Mall" which follows the essence of the public life in an imagined story based on my personal experience of living in Scarborough and utilizing strip mall spaces for the last eleven years. Concurrently, a daily activity section captures a more spatial reference to activities in an objective way—indoor and outdoor—in and around Scarborough's strip malls today.

A Daily Activity Calendar

The daily activity in and around strip malls are varied and they are as following:

1. Site anchor—locally popular destination with socialization inside. These include—but not limited to—a popular restaurant, food shop, barbershop, or community services like a tutoring centre or a library.
2. Multifarious and ethnic retail shops comprised of food, clothing, and utilitarian and discretionary services.
3. Fluid accessibility and shortcuts on foot, cycle, and automobile.
4. Adult friends socializing in or around their car.
5. Teenagers on bicycle or skateboards—hanging out.
6. Person showing off their car modifications.
7. People conversing in the threshold space of the strip mall building, such as the porch.
8. Person blasting music in their car—windows are often rolled down.
9. RapidTO—city program to paint outermost lanes on busy main roads for priority bus and cycle lanes.
10. People jaywalking between strip malls across the street.
11. Car or public bus are the only viable mobility methods besides a car—a car culture is forced by the design of the urban environment.
12. All strip malls—422 buildings in Scarborough—generally have a niche shop or vibe.



The daily activity that occurs in the present situation of the strip malls are not entirely visible all the time as they do not happen concurrently. The strip mall shops are the main formal attractor of people to these strip mall sites and its vicinity. Apart from the sidewalk, the parking lot is what is left to be negotiated by the patrons. With a lack of human-oriented spaces, conversations are the primary informal activity.

Fig.137: Daily Activity, diagram



Fig.138: Social Interaction Inside, photo



Fig.139: Social Interaction Inside, photo



Fig.140: Social Interaction Outside, photo



Fig.141: Social Interaction Outside, photo



Fig.142: Social Interaction Outside, photo



Fig.143: Social Interaction—Jaywalk, photo

A Summer Evening at the Strip Mall

6:27 pm

Two friends grab a snack, after parking the car at the open parking lot.

Sameer: We can just lean on my car, I guess that's how it works here. But I wish there were a spot to sit and have a conversation.

Rishaff: I imagine what a place to sit would look like here. It would be nice if it were shaded too.

(a remix of A.R. Rahman music playing in the distance, from a small speaker outside the takeout restaurant)

Rishaff: You know, if you didn't bring me here, I would have never thought to come here myself. From the street, when you are driving or taking the bus, they look like eyesores, but somehow when I come close, at an intimate level, there is a sense of authenticity, a feeling of home. There are so much going on here, visually and you know physically. By the way, "Aunt Elsie's Caribbean Kitchen West Indian Jerk Take Out Food & Grocery", two stores down, looks like they sell everything in this world.

(laughter)



Fig.144: Two Friends, sketch

6:44 pm

Aunt Elsie's is a takeout restaurant combined with an extensive collection of authentic and hard to find Caribbean grocery items.

Amelia (a regular customer): I haven't seen you here before.

Jayden: I was told that I can find the best Jamaican patties here. My high school friends always talk about this place.



Fig.145: Aunt Elsie's, sketch

6:53 pm

Loitering adolescents on bikes, getting their regular sugar fix after a basketball game few blocks down.

Kyle: Is it weird to sit on the ground? This concrete parking block looks like the most comfortable thing to sit on here.

Liang: Don't worry I sit on those all the time, sometimes even on the curbs, best spot to enjoy your drink. The asphalt gets too hot to sit on, I read somewhere that the sun' heat is absorbed and plus, there are more garbage here so…



Fig.146: Loitering Adolescents, sketch

7:31pm

Friends meet up at the parking lot to show off their car modifications to each other.

Andre: The spoiler matches the decals on your Civic man.

Abdul: I bought this off a guy at this strip plaza last week. That guy gave it to me for free.

Andre: Do you have his number? Maybe I can get one too!



Fig.147: Car Show Off, sketch

7:46 pm

A smoker

(internal monologue)

Its so lonely out here, I wish I had the funds to live in downtown or something. Its so hard to meet people in the suburbs, nothing to do and no place to go.



Fig.148: Smoker, sketch

7:55 pm

Regulars at the Barbershop

Sanjith: Are these chairs new? The red leather ones feel much better than the old black ones from before.

Aadijay: You know, I got them over 10 years ago so its been a time for a little change.

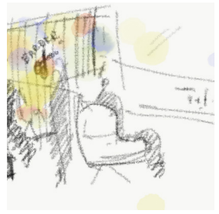


Fig.149: Barbershop Regulars, sketch

8:45 pm

Mother asks her son to run a quick errand

Mother: Nikheel! Can you run to Aunt Elsie's and get a pound of okra, a can of cardamom and a can of condensed milk? I'm preparing a dish for the guests tonight. They close at 9.

Mother: Just wear your sweats, you don't need to impress anyone at the strip mall. Here's my card. Go! Quick!



Fig.150: Errand, sketch

9:30 pm

Post prayer at the local mosque's parking lot

Fatima: We should move from the staircase, other sisters are trying to exit.

Zara: As-salamu alaykum ladies, I didn't notice you inside during prayers. How is your son doing?



Fig.151: Mosque Parking Lot, sketch

9:48 pm

Ibrahim's Halal pizza shop beside the mosque.

Ibrahim: It will be ready in fifteen minutes, wish I had chairs in the store for my customers to sit. The space is too small. The parking lot doesn't have any chairs either. Sorry about that.

Zara: Don't worry about that at all, we'll just stand outside.



Fig.152: Halal Pizza, sketch

11:56 pm

Group of adult male friends leaning on their car after a hard day at work.

Sriansh: Guys I need to take a leak, is there a washroom nearby?

Koushik: Maybe try the bakery? Seems like these places don't have public washrooms, what about the Timmies down the road?

Steve: Probably your best bet.

Arham: Or you know, go behind the strip mall.



Fig.153: Friend Group, sketch

Mobility and Alternatives to the Car

Without a car, travelling around Scarborough is not easy. Main methods to travel around Scarborough is with a car or the Toronto Transit Commission (TTC) public bus. The arterial street system in Scarborough is laid out in a grid system, fundamentally. The main roads run north, south, east, and west, and these encase cul-de-sac neighbourhood streets. The scale of the arterial roads along with the distance between points of interests are large enough that walking and the inconsistent bus services are troublesome, which warrants the need for a car to get to places. While there are three possibilities of a mass transit train line in Scarborough—two major ones called the Scarborough subway line extension and Eglinton light rail line are under construction. The third train line is merely the tip of the "green" subway line that dips into Scarborough south with three spaced out stops—these stops are Victoria Park, Warden and Kennedy. These stops merely act as a people collector for those heading towards downtown. Beyond these train lines, there is an infrequent and more expensive GO train service that is catered to planned trips—never for casual informal trips—and it has seven spaced out stations in Scarborough.

The train situation warrants the need for a car in the everyday life of residents in Scarborough. There is however, a missing middle of transportation infrastructure that could be celebrated in Scarborough—it is the cycle lanes on major roads. While there are existing cycling lanes in Scarborough, these primarily exist in natural trails, outside of the road network. This is not to say there aren't any cycle lanes on the roads. There are. These could almost be counted by hand and are rarely protected and permanent dedicated cycling lanes that allow people to use safely everyday, anytime. Existing cycle lane types in Scarborough are shared pedestrian and cycling trails, on street shared bus and cycling painted lane, temporary test on street protected cycle lane, and dedicated curbed cycle lane. Besides the trails, the rest are very minimal in their network of connection—these are practically unimpactful in their implementation. Despite the lack of care for cycling as a mobility method in Scarborough and other inner suburbs, there are some studies and program implementation for implementing a cycling culture in this part of the city. Building Bike Culture Beyond Downtown is a guide to create suburban bike hubs and it looks at Scarborough as a potential for implementing its ideas. The guide reports that majority of everyday trips are less than 5 km long for discretionary purposes and can easily be cycled within 20 minutes. It identifies barriers to cycling in Scarborough such as a lack of safe bike lanes and bike parking. But people are willing to cycle for everyday trips, which is an opportunity.[79] This guide helped to implement a program called Scarborough Cycles and it establishes community bike hubs in a community centre with bike repair tools and programs that incubate cycling.[80] In the downtown core, cycling is a celebrated travel method since there is the physical infrastructure that transforms social norms towards it.

Similarly, Scarborough can also be transformed with similar infrastructures with improved access for pedestrians. Beyond cycling, the intersections of the main roads are signalled with linear crosswalks in opposite directions. In more subtle streets, there are x-marked orange light pedestrian-controlled crosswalks. As a third case, broken sidewalks due to a street is often just marked with two lines and allow the pedestrian to visually negotiate their path with an oncoming vehicle—the rule is that pedestrian priority comes first. There is a last instance where pedestrians need to cross informally—also known as jaywalking—between large distance at main roads. There is a concern for safety and human need at these large sections of crosswalk free zones—the gaps between crosswalks need to be shortened. A deep change of philosophy among Scarborough's traffic engineers and urban planners is needed and there is little change in sight because of the traffic focus on moving communities.

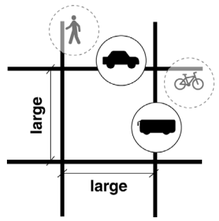


Fig.154: Mobility, diagram

Because of the infrastructure, cars and buses are the formal (popular) mobility methods while walking and cycling are the informal (less popular) methods.



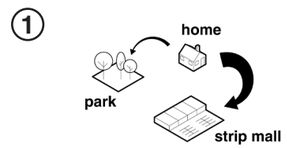
Fig.155: Wide Arterial Road—Lawrence Avenue East; Scarborough, photo



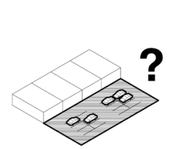
Fig.156: Typical Cycle Lane; Toronto, photo



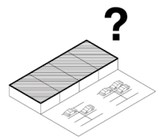
Fig.157: Light Activated Pedestrian Crossover; Scarborough, photo



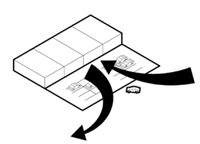
Strip malls are not celebrated as public spaces, yet frequented ritualistically everyday due to their utility. Whereas, parks are planned destinations which are not part of the everyday life.



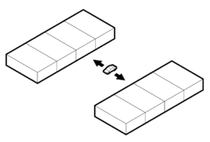
Strip mall parking lots are underutilized—not all parking spots are occupied regularly.



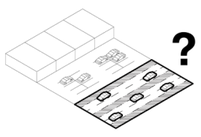
Roofs of single storey strip malls can potentially be utilized since typical maximum height is two stories.



Strip malls are designed for speed—for automobiles and quick shopping.



Strip malls are disconnected from each other—only connected via automobile roads.



Arterial roads are unnecessarily wide with no cycle infrastructure—the centre and outermost centre lanes are underutilized.

Strip malls are part of the everyday life for Scarborough residents, unlike parks and green spaces. But the problem with strip malls are that their spaces are underutilized—between the parking lots and the roofs. At the same time, there is a lack of physical connection between strip malls and the surrounding infrastructure always necessitate the automobile.

Fig.158: Scarborough's Strip Mall Problem, diagram

COVID-19 and Climate Change

The coronavirus pandemic of 2020 and 2021 has accelerated a state of evolution in the way we practice our everyday life—between working from home and wearing masks at public spaces to rediscovering the recreational value of outdoor and public spaces. In the effort to reduce the spread of coronavirus, The City of Toronto has implemented various spatial programs that create direct and micro scale impact throughout the city. These programs are named as ActiveTO, CafeTO and CurbTO.

ActiveTO entailed closing major roads for pedestrian oriented spaces. Among these were broadening the on-street cycle network by closing one automobile lane, introducing quiet streets for pedestrians, and creating complete streets where automobile lanes coexist with temporary pedestrian spaces such as widened sidewalks.[81]While major roads were closed such as the Lake Shore Boulevard East to accommodate only pedestrian and cyclists, other unprecedented actions from the city such as suburban on-street cycle lanes brought human scale active transportation outside the downtown core. Scarborough has benefitted from ActiveTO immensely, even with its temporary nature on Brimley Road spanning from Kingston Road to Lawrence Avenue East, connecting natural trails in the north (hydro corridor) and south (Scarborough Bluffs). The enhancement of life through simple yet temporary interventions with paint and protection pylons for cycling is possible in an automobile oriented inner-city suburb like Scarborough.

CafeTO allows main street food establishments such as restaurants to expand outdoor seating to the street and sidewalk.[82] Despite being temporary in nature, the outcome of converting automobile lanes into people-oriented patio spaces with tactile infrastructure created more lively moments, throughout the city.

CurbTO allowed shops to let customers occupy a closed street lane or public sidewalk for socially distanced queuing, with temporary ground marking and pylon protections.[83] This solution reinforces the versatile possibility of automobile and sidewalk infrastructure since they can be transformed into spaces for people with minimal interventions. Physical distance and mask mandates for the coronavirus pandemic forced new possibilities of urban spaces to evolve quickly and naturally. These programs from the city level helped organize the official ways of establishing people-oriented spaces. Concurrently, independent retail shops in strip malls, implemented ad hoc measures to keep their businesses solvent such as taking over the parking lot with sheltered seating. This became particularly challenging, like all the city-wide initiatives, to properly work in the winter since masks were mandatory indoors, as such, for food establishments like restaurants, take out orders became the only method to serve customers.

With the lived experiences of the pandemic, the question on what climate change will do to our life is not so far off. While the pandemic is temporary, along with its effects on our urban life, what happens if an unprecedented disaster were to happen again—only permanent

1. **ActiveTO**
2. **CaféTO**
3. **CurbTO**

Fig.159: City of Toronto COVID-19 Initiatives, diagram



Fig.160: CurbTO, diagram

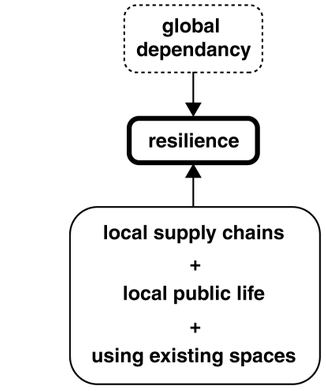


Fig.161: ActiveTO—Brimley Road; Scarborough, photo



Fig.162: CafeTO—Queen Street East; Toronto, photo

this time? With this disaster being the effects brought by climate change, our life will experience the negative effects and force adaptability which is not so different from the COVID-19 pandemic times. Firstly, the paradigm of the pandemic shocked the supply chain internationally. This situation signals the need for locally dependant life for when climate change really takes a permanent toll on supply chains. Secondly, this pandemic is a taste of micro and macro scale adaptability which will permanently be required for the effects from climate change. Life became more local during the pandemic—local public spaces and destinations became necessary spaces to spend time in, amidst travel restrictions—signalling the future resiliency during the crisis of climate change. Lastly, in this pandemic, there was a need to make best use of what we already have instead of producing new things—manufacturing that relies on global supply chains may be impossible due to permanent supply shortage during deeper times into climate change. There remains a parallel connection between the spatial resilience this pandemic created with what climate change holds for our future.



While global dependence is necessary for some things, it should not be the primary source. Strip malls provide local economies and life which create resilient communities.

Fig.163: Climate Change, diagram



Fig.164: Ad Hoc Seating; Scarborough, photo



Fig.165: Ad Hoc Seating; Scarborough, photo



Fig.166: Ad Hoc Display; Scarborough, photo



Fig.167: Ad Hoc Party; Scarborough, photo

Proposed Situation

The proposed situation builds on the present situation by improving its vitality and public life through the method of intervention, rather than demolition. A design criteria is defined to establish a model for design—public space is defined in terms of indoor and outdoor space, the network is defined as a link between the public spaces, and managerial challenges encompasses the realms of ownership, time, scale, and business competition. Additionally, precedent projects that can influence the design portion of this thesis are reviewed. With these strategies, the design criteria are implemented as a sample in segments. First, the public space and network is designed. Scarborough's cycle network and strip mall locations are surveyed with a top-down and bottom-up approach to find and implement the design criteria onto the chosen sample site, not without the considerations of the added vitality and public life. Vitality is ensured through spatial opportunities that serve the daily life and special events which can be hosted onto the existing condition, with the help of interventions. Public life is imagined with the established human centred atmosphere and potential social links formed beyond the sample site. Second, managerial challenges—the question of who maintains and polices the public spaces—break down the roles ranging from city authority to shop owner, any management relative to time of use, scale of impact and any new business competition from the proposed situation is addressed. The implementation of the design criteria on an identified sample site is cumulatively a design solution.

Design Criteria

Design criteria are a way to establish universality or a model approach for successive design solutions on any strip mall locations in Scarborough and beyond. The design criteria for this thesis design strategy are comprised of three fundamental elements: public space, network, and managerial challenges. These elements work in symbiosis to create the vitality and public life in the proposed situation.

design criteria
=
network
+
public spaces
+
managerial challenges

Fig.168: Design Criteria Method, diagram

Public Space

Public space is at the heart of the proposed strip mall design situation since it is situated in the strip mall sites and is the final destination to being communities together. It is segmented into indoor and outdoor spaces—to utilize the strip mall site to its full potential—without demolition and complete physical renewal. Indoor spaces create conditions for creation, exhibition, and service. Creation is meant to be a spatial condition that promotes the possibility to produce things through social gathering—from performance arts to food. Creation is also to be celebrated in conjunction with opportunities to exhibit to audiences—from concerts to food sharing. To support the spaces for creation and exhibition comes the need for services ranging from washrooms and storage spaces. While the indoor spaces symbiotically work with each other, they also act in harmony with outdoor spaces which address necessary elements for design: pavement, seat and table, cycle, lighting, greenery, and canopy tent. Pavement, as an example, is a way to identify separation of use through treatment of the ground, which is typically the asphalt defining strip mall parking lots. Seats and tables provide respite for people going using the strip mall facilities and restructure the way they experience the strip mall as a public space. Moveable chairs and tables provide autonomy to people and varied seating types can promote grounding to the flux of activities occurring in the public space, or the strip mall site. Cycling infrastructure such as an air pump station facilitate the strip mall as a destination for the cycle network. Lightning of varied types including focused and ambient lamps improve visual navigation and psychological comfort and safety at darker times of the day. Greenery provides microclimatic conditions where simultaneously providing visual pleasure and psychological comfort and also provides environmental benefits. Canopy tents are a broad way to create controllable shaded regions on the parking lot public space to establish a comfortable condition to create exhibitions or simply for relaxation.

While each strip mall site represent a local public space, a combination or a cluster of strip malls can be identified as community hubs. These community hubs can act a primary destination for a larger radius of community who can seek multifarious activities and amenities, providing the strip mall shop owners with increased business.

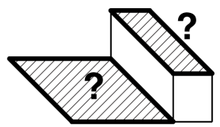


Fig.169: Public Space Method 1, diagram

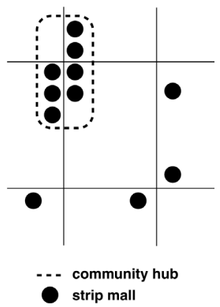


Fig.170: Public Space Method 2, diagram

Network

The network is a combination of cycle lanes and crosswalks which seek to connect the public spaces spread across a given area. With a lack of pedestrian and active mobility on suburban streets, the expanded network is a way to give space to that while connecting various strip mall sites with a physical infrastructure. The network is not meant to be a high-cost permanent change but rather the provision of spaces to cycling and walking with minimal interventions like painted roads and pylon protections on existing roads. The cycle lanes seek to connect with the broader existing cycle network, if any. This will encourage many to use the cycle lanes which become a real alternative to automobile and at the same time bring more vitality and public life into the strip mall sites and increase the customer base for strip mall shops. On the other hand, the crosswalks are meant to physically connect strip mall sites which are nearby, as it can improve safe pedestrian activity regardless of the existing automobile oriented urban design of the suburbs. The network is a connection between public spaces through active mobility for micro (crosswalks) and macro scales (cycle lanes).

Concurrent to the physical network of cycle lanes and crosswalks, the various sites of public spaces can produce a psychological network of socially connected spaces. This can promote exchange of information beyond one public space location and out to the first (home) and second (work) places of life for Scarborough's communities.



Fig.173: Network Method 1, diagram

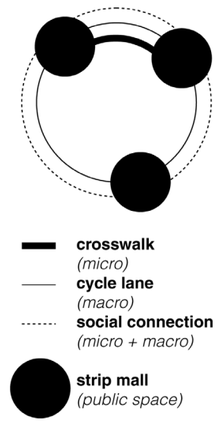


Fig.171: Network Method 2, diagram

Managerial Challenges

Management is an important portion for the continuity of the public spaces and network as a project and is comprised of four parts: ownership, time, scale, and business competition.

Ownership consists of funding, maintenance, automobile parking, and road logistics. Management of funding can be pooled from different parties involved from community member to strip mall shop owners to city funds. Maintenance, like cleaning and policing of the public space and network can be appropriated between different parties like the city and the strip mall owners. Automobile parking can be a contested space in a strip mall, as shops are sometimes allocated a specific number of spots in front of their physical stores. Additionally, in automobile-oriented suburbs, a vehicle is necessary to travel to essential places like a strip mall, so naturally parking becomes necessary. The removal of parking to make way for the public space needs to be considered with the involved parties such as the store owners and patrons for the project implementation. Lastly, road logistics like allocation of vehicle lanes for left, right and straight drives, in addition to signal for crosswalks are necessary for safety and legal requirements, will be discussed and negotiated with municipal traffic planners.

Development time can be broken down into short run and long run

Who funds it?
Who manages it?

Fig.172: Managerial Challenges Method, diagram

considerations. The short run is considered as the time frame, for design elements when the strip mall exists before being demolished for future projects, maybe in a decade or two. The long run on the other hand is considered to be the time frame for design elements beyond the time the strip mall cease to exist—when it is replaced with another building such as a condominium.

Scale of maintenance is broken down into local (private) and city (municipal). The local level consists of the public space elements in the strip mall sites and the crosswalks. These can be assigned to smaller parties like strip mall shopkeepers. The municipal level on the other hand involves the cycle lane, the crosswalk as well, and can be assigned for maintenance to the city authorities. Also any street lighting and tree planting fall under municipal initiative and management.

Business competition for introduced programs onto strip mall sites are broken down into existing businesses and proposed businesses. Existing businesses are the strip mall shops and these have the most say to the strip mall sites. This can mean that their business profits come before anything else proposed on the site. Proposed businesses involve the public space markets or other paid enterprises. These new possibilities for money generation will always need to be permitted by the shop owners or be different to the existing shops so as to not interfere with the existing vitality and profits. There is a chance that the proposed businesses cannot happen in certain strip malls due to the aforementioned situation.

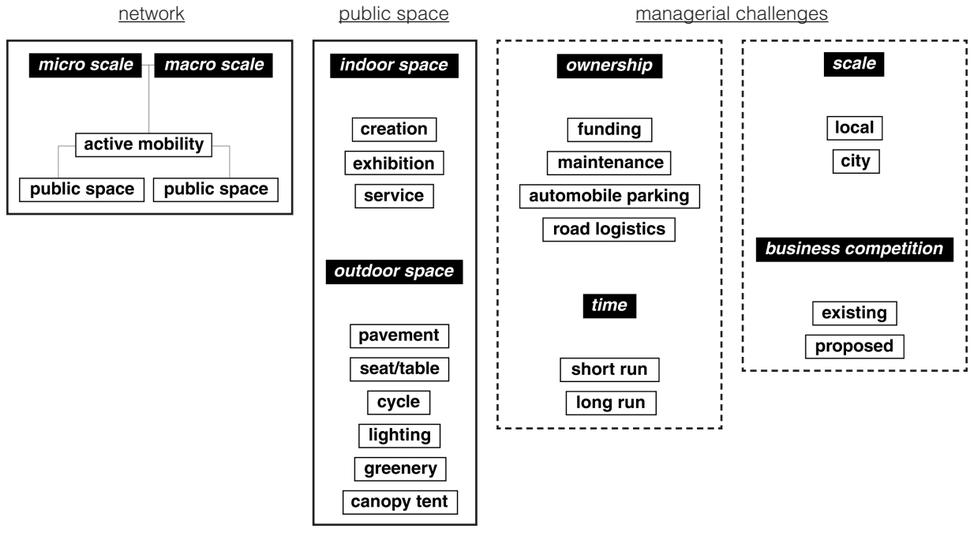


Fig.174: Design Criteria, diagram

The design criteria involve the creation of public spaces and a network which are organized with a set of managerial challenges.

Precedents for the Thesis Design

In symbiosis with the five intellectual allies, design directive precedents are selected. These are segmented as international, Canada, and Scarborough but all provide insights into conditions of participation and ephemerality within fixed frameworks, meaning temporality within permanent infrastructure, while welcoming anyone to its space. International precedents are Campo de'Fiori in Rome, Berkeley's People's Park in Berkeley, and Parklet Program in San Francisco. Precedents from Canada are Pavement-to-Plaza Program in Vancouver and Thorncliffe Park women's committee initiatives and Corner Commons in Toronto. Local Scarborough precedents are informal mango markets, WexPOPS, and Taste of Lawrence.

International

Campo de'Fiori, Rome, Italy

In Italian, campo means field and fiori means flowers, so this paved public square in Rome, or piazza in Italian, garners its name from its original state as a flower field or at least as a flower market. Being surrounded by notable buildings, the piazza's popularity welcomed retail businesses surrounding it. This square hosted horse markets in the past but today it hosts morning flower, fruit, and vegetable markets every week between Monday and Saturday. During evening, the bustling restaurants and bars surrounding the square creates a vibrant public life which is vital to the area, drawing people to it daily.[84] It is significant for this thesis that Campo de'Fiori establishes a symbiotic vitality and public life throughout the whole day by coexisting ephemeral markets on the paved square in the morning and permanent restaurants and retail shops in the periphery. The market clears by evening to make way for social gatherings on the square through mini performances, outdoor dining, and informal meetings amongst people.



Fig.175: Campo de' Fiori; Rome, photo

Berkeley's People's Park, Berkeley, USA

People's Parks were a form of protest against urban renewal amongst others by illegal placemaking throughout the late 1960s and early 1970s, where vacant sites were occupied and transformed through communal participatory work, art and food consumption by activists.[85] Situated primarily in the United States and also existing in smaller numbers in Canada, Denmark and South Africa, the ephemeral occupations brought people of all types together to materialize their common empowerment against the regulatory authority. Many of the vacant sites have become designated parks today.[86] Berkeley's People's Park encapsulates this movement very well with its level of documentation and continued fight to retain the park till today. In 1969, a University of California owned untamed vacant land filled with junk, meant to be filled with future student housing, was occupied by community activist volunteers through simple landscape



Fig.176: Berkeley's People's Park; Berkeley, photo

interventions such as sod, swings, murals, and a mini amphitheatre. The less than a month-long event was also accompanied by a stew where everyone provided ingredients for the collective meal.[87] Work and creativity in a situated event materialized the collective desire for an open public space, even on a private land. Despite the resistance, these activists were met with police brutality, leading to the bulldozed clearing of the park and a perimeter chain fence being erected. It was not until 1972, the Vietnam War escalation caused another uprising leading to the fence being removed by the people.[88] While it remains an open community park today, the university has revived the student housing plans in 2021 which is slating the park for demolition. This has caused the university students to occupy the park as a form of resistance, yet again.[89] The condition of the ephemeral event like collective resistance on a permanent land for a situated outcome of wanting a public space will be important for this thesis's proposed situation.

Parklet Program, San Francisco, USA

Mimicked in cities around the world, San Francisco's parklet program are contained physical public amenities such as seating, plants and cycle racks situated on streets occupying two to three parking spaces throughout the city. These are economical and creatively designed temporary and permanent structures which seek to vitalize the streets to provide spaces for the public realm and improve businesses near them. These parklets are simple but material manifestation of the symbiosis between communities, the city, and local businesses. The parklets are wholly sponsored and maintained by the respective small businesses, community organizations, residents, and non-profit institutions while the city only issues permit for their proposals.[90] Pertaining to this thesis, the nature of occupying parking spaces to provide spaces for the public realm with support from various parties with multifarious design is important.



Fig.177: Parklet Program; San Francisco, photo

National

Pavement-to-Plaza Program, Vancouver

As the name suggests, this program in Vancouver converts street surfaces into plazas for people. These spaces are meant to celebrate community related events and engage an aura of civic expression through social interactions. Inspired by San Francisco and New York, "[t]he program aims to provide high-impact, low-cost public spaces through action while planning".[91] The target locations of this program primarily involve those areas with pedestrian traffic and lively retail. In addition to providing people spaces, they are also meant to encourage environmentally friendly mobility such as walking, cycling and public transit in addition to supporting local businesses with increased foot traffic. While the plazas vary in their budgets, they generally carry both permanent and temporary elements to implement their existence. The permanent elements include signages, overhead lighting, roadblocks, curb constructions



Fig.178: Pavement-to-Plaza Program; Vancouver, photo

and planters, while the temporary elements include interventions like paint and moveable seating. These plazas are planned to be distributed in variety of neighborhoods to create localized plazas with different funding and collaborative methodologies like including the local Business Improvement Areas. With their creative, colourful, and functional character, the top-down program creates bottom-up vitality and improved public life that benefits localised community people with social opportunities and shops with more revenue.

Thorncliffe Park Women's Committee initiatives, Toronto

With the organically formed grassroots initiatives, the local vitalization of R.V. Burgess Park in Toronto by the Thorncliffe Park Women's Committee has provided nuanced transformation to the community. First, they were able to pool funds and seek permit for a tandoor oven in the park while simultaneously hosting annual temporary community markets around it to create and event like condition out of nothing. With food and cultural possibilities in the markets, vitality was provided to a park that had the potential to host such a condition. Second, eventually with increased funds, the committee was able to start a permanent park in the café in a shipping container selling ethnic variety of foods directly catering to the community it is situated in. This café sells food with produce grown from their community gardens with prices that are affordable for the community. Lastly, over the years, their initiatives have grown to increasingly vitalize the potential of the park with children arts and gardening programs.[92] For this thesis, it is important how simple interventions like shipping container can house programs which can be user modified to organically meet the needs of its community.



Fig.179: Thorncliffe Park Women's Committee Initiatives; Toronto, photo

Stackt Market and Giant Containers, Toronto

Utilizing shipping containers, the Stackt Market in Toronto hosts a variety of pop-up retail shops while creating outdoor public spaces for everyone to gather. Situated on a vacant lot, this recent project was made possible by the Toronto based global company Giant Containers, which supplied the shipping containers and the arrangement designed by LGA Architectural Partners.[93] Furthermore, Giant Containers also designed and transformed many other varieties of spaces using shipping containers. These include the CNE washrooms, Cannabis Cultivation Classroom, Penguin Pick-Up Centres located in parking lots, amongst other commercial, residential, and industrial projects.[94] It is relevant for this thesis that shipping containers can be transformed by upcycling them to be usable spaces which are complete with ventilation, doors, and windows and their transformation flexibility will be vital to the design portion of this thesis.



Fig.180: Stackt Market and Giant Containers; Toronto, photo

Local

Informal mango markets, Scarborough

Located in parking lots and public right of ways, there are informal



Fig.181: Informal Mango Markets; Scarborough, photo

mango markets sparsed in Scarborough selling a variety of types catering to the local multicultural population. Suresh Doss, a CBC Toronto food writer, tweeted that “Lawrence Avenue East in Scarborough has become the destination for mangos” and which is catered “to accommodate the evolving demographics in the area”.[95] These informal mango markets exist in three ways currently—they exist in a van and truck on parking lots and a stall on roadside right of ways. The van is a typical family car that situates itself near local mosques. The truck exists one a strip mall parking lot while the roadside stall houses itself on foldable tables. Despite their aesthetic attractiveness, word of mouth and signages attract clients with their niche international mangoes.

WexPOPS, Scarborough

This temporary parklet like structure is a product of Daniel’s Rotsztain’s plazaPOPS program established in his MLA thesis which is previously mentioned in the literature review chapter of this thesis. PlazaPOPS is a program designed to enhance strip mall parking lots through public spaces. Although the program does not establish the exact design or enhancement strategy, which is its weakness, this WexPOPS project is a successful attempt in creating an engaging low-cost public space amenity on a strip mall parking lot. WexPOPS is situated on Lawrence Avenue East and Warden Avenue in Scarborough. At the parking lot of Wexford Heights Plaza, this pilot landscape urbanist intervention promotes mini gatherings events with contained seats surrounded by potted plants and a large sign branding its name. In its small footprint, it hosts seating spaces, tables, umbrella shades and plants, all within a wood frame structure that encapsulates a portion of the parking asphalt to host mini performances. The aesthetic of the pop-up space is inviting with its natural feel and colourful touches. In its built capacity, it successfully negotiates the physical space on a private property, funding, and community participation to temporarily realize the social potential of the strip mall community.[96] For this thesis, it is important that a built public space can exist on a strip mall parking lot of Scarborough—provided that the space is negotiated well with the private parties and nature of private space involved.



Fig.182: WexPOPS; Scarborough, photo

Taste of Lawrence, Scarborough

This annual three-day event hosted by the Wexford Heights Business Improvement Area on Lawrence Avenue East brings people from all over the city to enjoy a celebratory atmosphere with authentic cuisines from all around the world. Running in the summer, few blocks of the main road is closed to make way for food carts, children playing structures and performance stages, all ephemerally existing for the event’s duration, hosting eateries from around the city. While there are no permanent changes to the physical conditions of the site, the temporary nature of it embody the social and pluralistic cultural spirit of Scarborough. For this thesis, it is important from this local strip mall supported event that coupling the closure of a major arterial road in a suburban context for a people only condition is possible.



Fig.183: Taste of Lawrence; Scarborough, photo

Design Criteria Implementation

In order to arrive at the quality of public space exemplified in places like Campo de’Fiori and People’s Park, and also to continue the type of local projects like Scarborough’s informal mango markets, the thesis design criteria are implemented in three segments: top-down and bottom-up strategies, intensified vitality and public life application, and allocation of managerial challenges. This methodology ensures that the macro and micro forces are addressed to test a sample idea for design at a specific site with a specific cycle network in Scarborough.

Top-Down Strategy

The top-down study is a kind of process to identify the test location for the public space and network in Scarborough and it is achieved by assessing physical elements from a map. First, the forces on Scarborough’s map are understood—these were identified in the present situation such as, subway stops and strip mall buildings. Second, a more focused scope is identified and it captures conditions including, centrality to Scarborough, BIAs, strip mall clusters, lack of construction developments and on major roads. Third, eliminating light rail transit proximity strip malls due to potential future gentrification and new unaged or primarily chain shop strip malls yields a more focused scope of strip mall clusters with independent shops. Fourth, existing cycle lanes of all types—temporary to permanent—are identified to see their relation and proximity to the identified strip mall clusters. Fifth, new cycles are designated such that they weave the strip mall clusters and existing permanent cycle lanes while connecting out from Scarborough westward. Sixth, the scope of the test site is focused down to Wexford Heights BIA since it encapsulates a linear character for crosswalks, is far from existing cycle lanes to expand the cycle network, has an existing BIA which makes it efficient for management and fund allocations, is a gate way from the centre of Toronto to make it an exemplary identity and has the most visually concentrated strip malls on the map to create community hubs.

Bottom-Up Strategy

The network is specified in the bottom-up process using maps, stories, personal firsthand experiences, and drawings. The identified Wexford Heights BIA scope from the top-down process is investigated with a more zoomed in map. The cycle lane is established to run both ways on Lawrence Avenue West. Then, the crosswalks are established—based on the locations of the strip malls—perpendicularly to each other across Lawrence Avenue East. Following the network on a map comes the narrative stories—defined in the pres-

ent situation—as a way to understand firsthand experiences cumulatively in Scarborough's strip malls. These stories help identify and validate design interventions for the proposed situation. For example, the necessity of bike lanes for the safety and encouragement of adolescents who arrive to strip malls in their bikes to loiter. Simultaneously, from a personal experience the width of Lawrence Avenue West which is seven automobile lanes in total is too big—the incorporation of a cycle lane on each side which takes over one automobile lane on each side will help to introduce a more human scale with the added purpose of active mobility. There are not enough crosswalks between Lawrence Avenue West, especially in this area, so using the strip mall as anchored crosswalk sites can really help to invite vital pedestrian activity in a highly automobile oriented space. Concurrently, the drawings show the activation of Lawrence Avenue East on Wexford Heights BIA with cycle lanes and crosswalks as a human friendly destination. The cycle lanes are made of temporary yet a rigid system—green painted lanes with marked cycling direction and protected plastic pylons bolted onto the asphalt for safety.

The public space is implemented in the bottom-up process using the same method of maps, stories, personal firsthand experiences, and drawings. In this process, the location of the public space test site is identified on the map using personal firsthand experience of where the design of public space can be exemplary—the strip mall building exhibited a classic condition of single-story height, parking lot, automobile road frontage, nearby strip malls and a friendly community atmosphere. The chosen site for the thesis public space test is Wexford Heights Plaza and its vicinity, which from its present situation is used to identify scopes of where the public space proposal is relevant as well. Finally, the drawings such as the diagrams and renderings, capture the atmosphere and implementation of the design visually and functionally as a working situation. While the design elements are born out of the design criteria, the renderings show the before and after conditions for the implementation of the design elements into the site. The implementation uses the design elements to create spatial programs, while building on the existing informal activities. This coupled with the network, create a visually and functionally wholistic environment for the proposed situation.

The addition of a second floor building on the roof with lightweight structures would mean the need for additional structural capacity within the strip mall building. Since some buildings are steel frames, while most others have concrete block parti-wall between units, this would mean either adding additional steel beams or adding extra reinforcements to the concrete parti-walls as appropriate. However, this would mean that the existing shops would be effected, meaning that construction in their spaces would be greatly opposed and subversive. Solution to this issue could be adding structural members that are independent of the strip mall structure. For example, this could mean that underneath the current raised floor, there are beams that span out from the roof and are loaded to exterior columns in a completely independent structural system. This would mean that the second floor social spaces become an independent realm both structurally and spatially from the first floor shops. This method is available as a late phase strategy, if achievable.

Vitality

The proposed situation inserts new vitality onto the strip mall site, which compounds on the existing vitality. Activities in the proposal exist around the clock due to new programs being coupled with vitality provided by existing shops. Importance of strip mall space-like offering to the community is rematerialized through the proposed situation. Public space programs created by the design elements flexibly exist in a duality of daily life and events, depending on the user needs. And, all the while, both daily life and events are enhanced by the proposed network of cycle lanes and crosswalks.

Daily Life

In the daily life of the public spaces, the design elements are structure that can be used anytime by the user. The permeable pavement is a permanent space to host informal gathering—it invites user defined performances like late night live music or even outdoor markets. The permeable pavement can become a permanent square to create a democratic space for all and can be aided with canopy tents for shade and elemental protection. Painted pavement in the parking spots ensures parking is provided—only altered for events which are discussed at the design section. The yellowish coloured shipping containers or lightweight modules—the colour adds a distinct additive identity—on the roof and in the parking lot of the strip mall hosts indoor spaces like a kitchen, community gathering spaces, storage, and bathrooms. Beyond these, greenery, like plants and trees, along with lighting, cycle infrastructures, seats, and tables serve the users at all times. The shipping container exterior walls can also host local artworks to celebrate the community feeling. These conditions coexist with parking spaces so as to celebrate the existing vitality provided by that space, always ensuring that closer parking spots to the shops are beyond the scope of intervention in the daily life for convenience. The strip mall public space, in conjunction with nearby strip malls, create a physical community hub. These proximal strip malls become visual and physical connection for choice of activity in the practice of everyday life for community residents. This can improve the quality of life for the everyday since more activity options are provided by an existing site.

Events

During events the public spaces become spaces to host specially planned days of celebratory conditions for the community to enjoy. The design elements for daily use evolve to embrace a larger crowd, while some unused elements embrace the events. The permeable pavements can be used to host planned gatherings like outdoor yoga, markets, and mini live music events, while the painted pavements can be used to embrace additional spaces as needed. A specially designed parking lot shipping container can be used to project movies onto or become a stage to host a concert. Other shipping containers can become spaces to host community cooking classes, dance practice sessions, weaving lessons, among other planned user defined social gathering. The chairs and tables remain

flexible to move around or be completely stored away depending on the type of event. The canopy tent can provide shade as needed, such as, markets may require shade from rain and so on. The focused and ambient lights can also change colours to create more vital conditions. Additionally, proximal strip malls, as a community hub, can become specially curated destinations depending on how big the user needs are. For example, a cultural art show can exist in many strip malls as a festive condition with dedicated programs for each public space including stage performances in one and still art showcases in others.

Public Life

Concurrent to vitality, the public life in the proposed situation is expected to be heightened from the present situation. This new atmosphere not only benefits the local community with more opportunities of amenities and social connection but also the store owners with more business due to increased foot traffic. The proposed situation ensures activity at all times with increased pedestrian traffic—simultaneously slows down the pace of life at these sites. This is also aided by the utilization of nearby strip malls which aid each other to subconsciously become community hubs—a larger destination for the most possibilities of human activities. The public spaces can subconsciously form a social network between communities and beyond these spaces themselves—they can form a social cohesion between neighbourhoods and communities across Scarborough. With the implementation of strip mall as public spaces and the network, there can be an increased respect and a sense of belonging due the celebration of the local community—the identity and potentials of the community is materialized through the proposed situation. The public life is further enhanced with the invitation to outsiders through the local public spaces that can be created throughout Scarborough's strip malls. The encouragement of human centred activities within existing sites, create pockets of happier places, even in an automobile oriented inner suburb. While the park is to bring one's children to, a strip mall public space is one where anyone is invited to, at any time of the day. And fundamentally, these public spaces—with the creation of an evolved third place destination—provide a social destination for the working-class communities in Scarborough.



Fig.184: Preliminary Idea—Network, sketch



Fig.185: Preliminary Idea—Public Space, sketch

Concept sketch idea of what it might feel like to be in a test strip mall site, Wexford Heights Plaza, with the design criteria implemented.

Implication of Managerial Challenges

Following are managerial challenges developed for the context specific situation of Scarborough's strip malls. Automobile parking under ownership and public space duration for the short and long run segments comprise the significant managerial challenges for the design, the rest is out of scope for the designer. A portion of the drawings point to the managerial challenges in a general way. Managerial challenges stem from the design criteria and is broken down into four segments: ownership, time, scale, and business competition.

Ownership

Ownership is segmented as funding, maintenance, automobile parking and road logistics. Funding of the network and the public space long run permanent elements (refer to the time section for breakdown) are the responsibility of the city authority, while the public space long run impermanent element are the responsibility of the BIA, strip mall owners, shop owner, and community. The City of Toronto has allocated funds for BIAs to improve spatial conditions. A webpage on the city website is a page entitled BIA Financial Incentives and has fundings for initiatives such as Streetscape Improvement Program, Innovation Fund, Winter Activation Grant, and Outside Mural & Street Art Program.[97] The Wexford Heights BIA can apply and draw from eligible city funds to implement the proposed situation. Individual strip malls can also apply for other city funds like Community Investment Funding which includes specific categories like Neighbourhood Grants and Community Events.[98] The city also provides funding for arts related programs called the Arts & Culture Grants and the strip malls can also apply for these grants to fund the proposed situation.[99] Maintenance—in terms of cleaning, policing and repairing—the network is the responsibility of the city authority and the public space is the responsibility of the BIA, strip mall owner, shop owner, community, and city authority. Automobile parking categorized as permanent are spaces adjacent to regular heavy traffic shop and areas without paving intervention. Automobile parking categorized as impermanent are the event area with painted pavement. Automobile parking categorized as removed are the area with permeable paving identified as a daily use area. Road logistics is categorized solely as the proper and legal establishment of the network and it is the responsibility of the city authority.

The road right of way or already owned public spaces on these strip mall lots are roughly the end of parking lot line offset roughly 5.5 metres to its interior. This means that a portion of the parking lot is already owned by the city. There is legibility in providing public spaces on a private lot like the Wexford Heights strip malls.

Time

Time is segmented as short run and long run. Short run includes public space duration, network duration and activity flux. Public space duration consists of permanent and impermanent elements. Permanent elements are pavement— permeable (daily use area) and painted (event area), greenery—plant and tree, cycle—air pump and locker, lighting—focused and ambient, creation/exhibition/service—shipping container, and seat/table—fixed. Impermanent elements are canopy tent and seat/table—moveable. The network duration is expanded as needed while activity flux is defined as daily use and events.

Long run includes public space duration, network duration and strip mall lifespan. Public space duration consists of permanent elements and impermanent elements. Permanent elements are pavement—permeable (daily use area), greenery—tree, cycle—air pump and locker, and lighting—focused. Impermanent elements are creation/exhibition/service—shipping container, canopy tent, pavement—painted (event area), seat/table—fixed and moveable, lighting—ambient, and greenery—plant. Network duration is understood to be modified as needed. Strip mall lifespan is based on the return on the investment calculation required by the strip mall ownership structure.

Scale

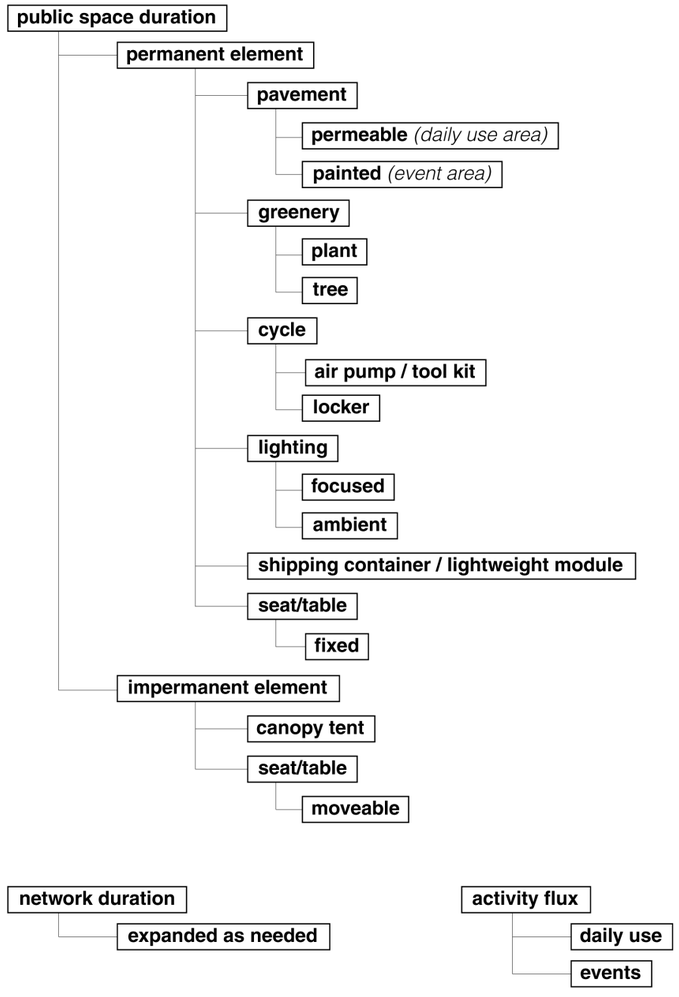
The scale of the design exists in a duality: local and city. At a local scale, the intrusiveness level by the proposed situation on the existing condition is always kept in mind. At a city scale, the physical and social connection between public spaces is recognized.

Business Competition

The design of the public space incorporates exhibition as a component on the parking lot. This can interfere with existing strip mall shops. Existing retail is categorized as expensive retail shops since they provide the rent, and through the proposed situation they can increase business through concentration of people in their strip mall. Proposed retail is categorized as cheap retail since they do not pay rent—if they pay rent, its lesser than the existing shops—this makes them only exist as temporary shops to maximize the site potential while simultaneously increasing foot traffic.

time

short run *During the everyday use—today.*

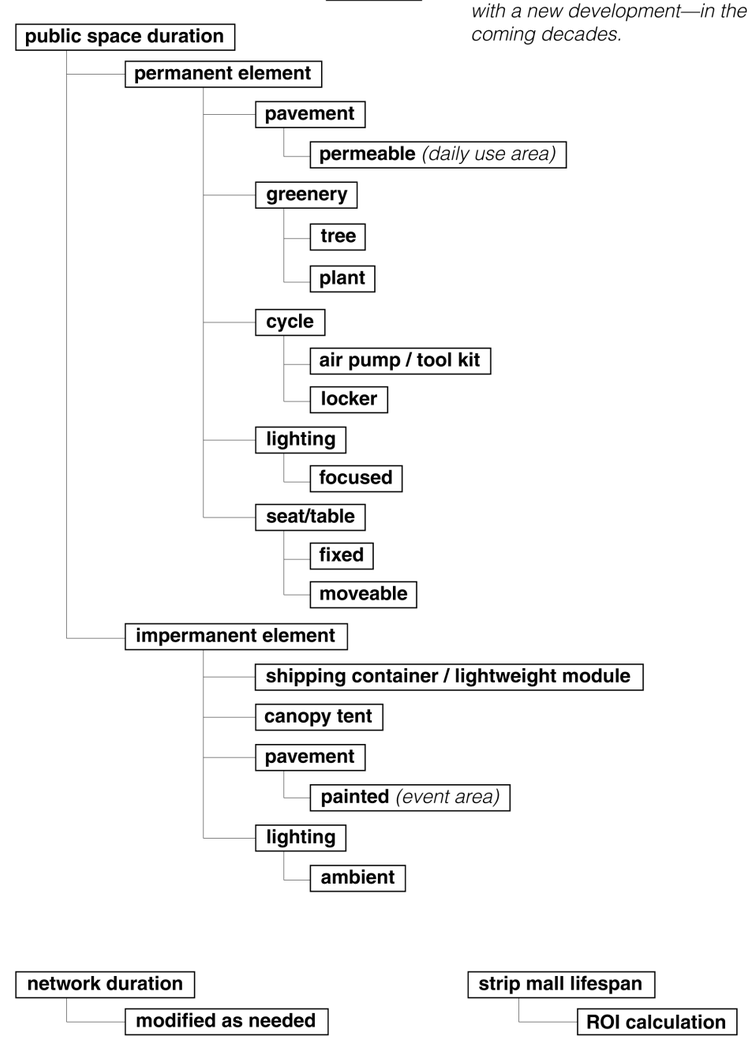


During the life of the proposed situation, the design elements are in flux—the network can grow while the public space will change regularly.

Fig.186: Proposed Managerial Challenges—Time—Short Run, diagram

time

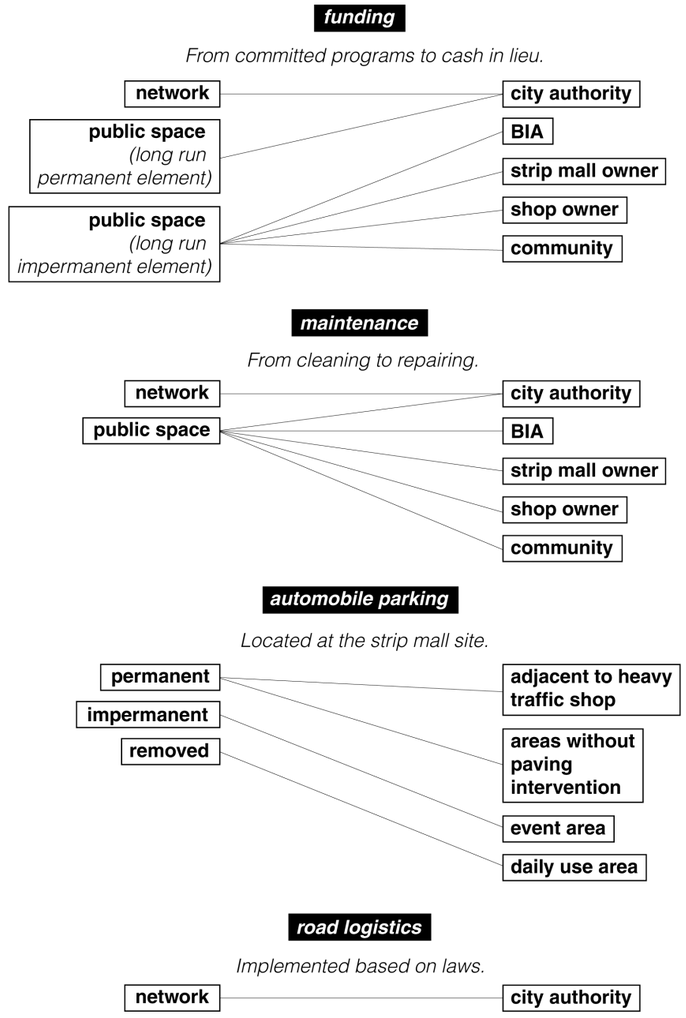
long run *For when the strip mall is replaced with a new development—in the coming decades.*



In 20-40 years later when the strip mall site of Wexford Heights Plaza or others are earmarked for demolition, the permanent elements will remain to maintain the community civic culture.

Fig.187: Proposed Managerial Challenges—Time—Long Run, diagram

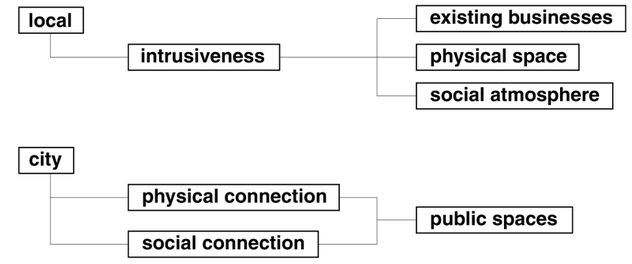
ownership



While aspects of the automobile parking and road logistics are implemented in the design, maintenance and funding is reflected in the use of the space.

Fig.188: Proposed Managerial Challenges—Ownership, diagram

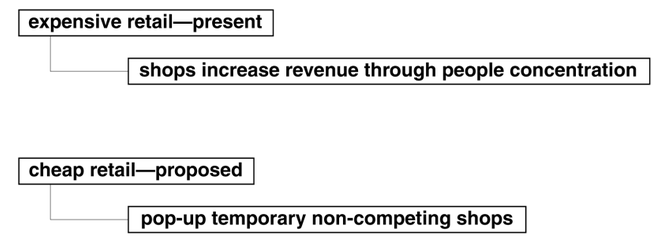
scale



The scale of the intervention is both micro (strip mall site) and macro (city location). Existing conditions which are vital need to be respected while spaces with potential can evolve.

Fig.189: Proposed Managerial Challenges—Scale, diagram

business competition

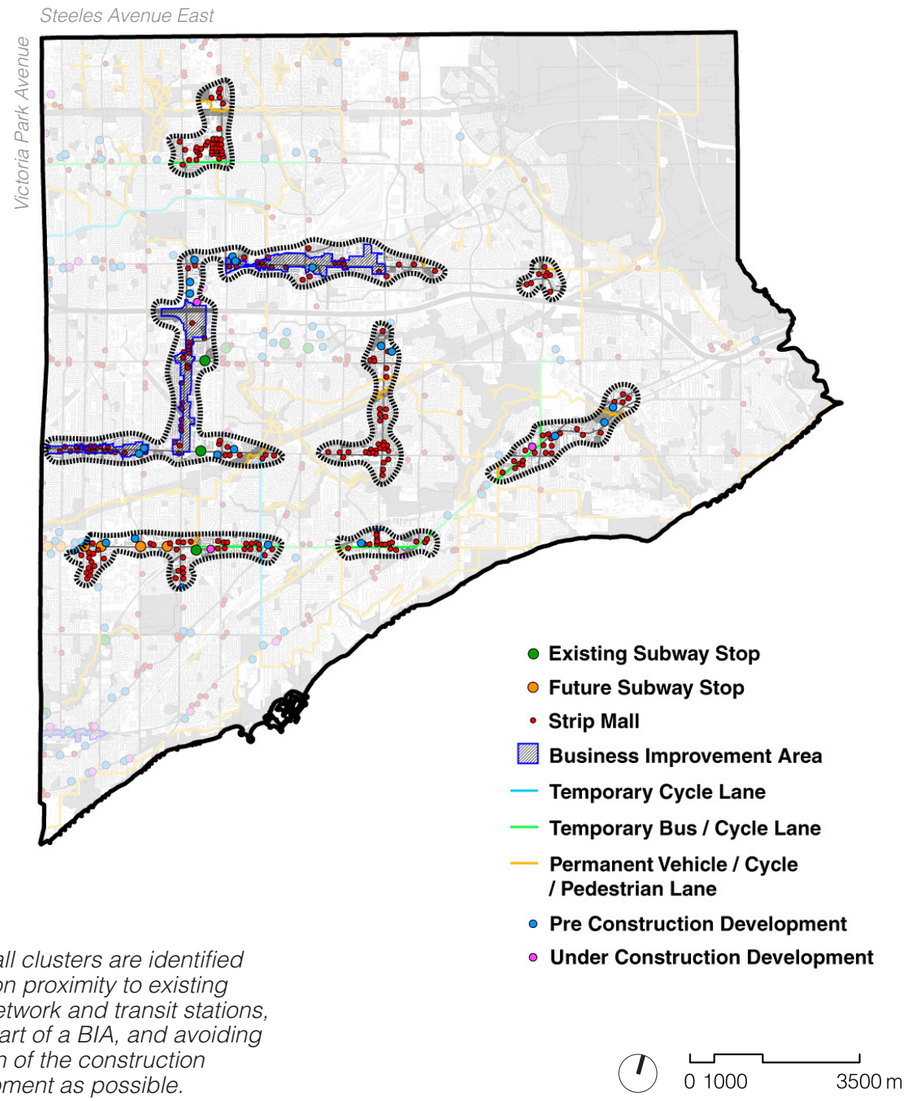


The implementation of parking lot pop-up markets can actually help the existing strip mall businesses in that they bring in more people to a specific site.

Fig.190: Proposed Managerial Challenges—Business Competition, diagram

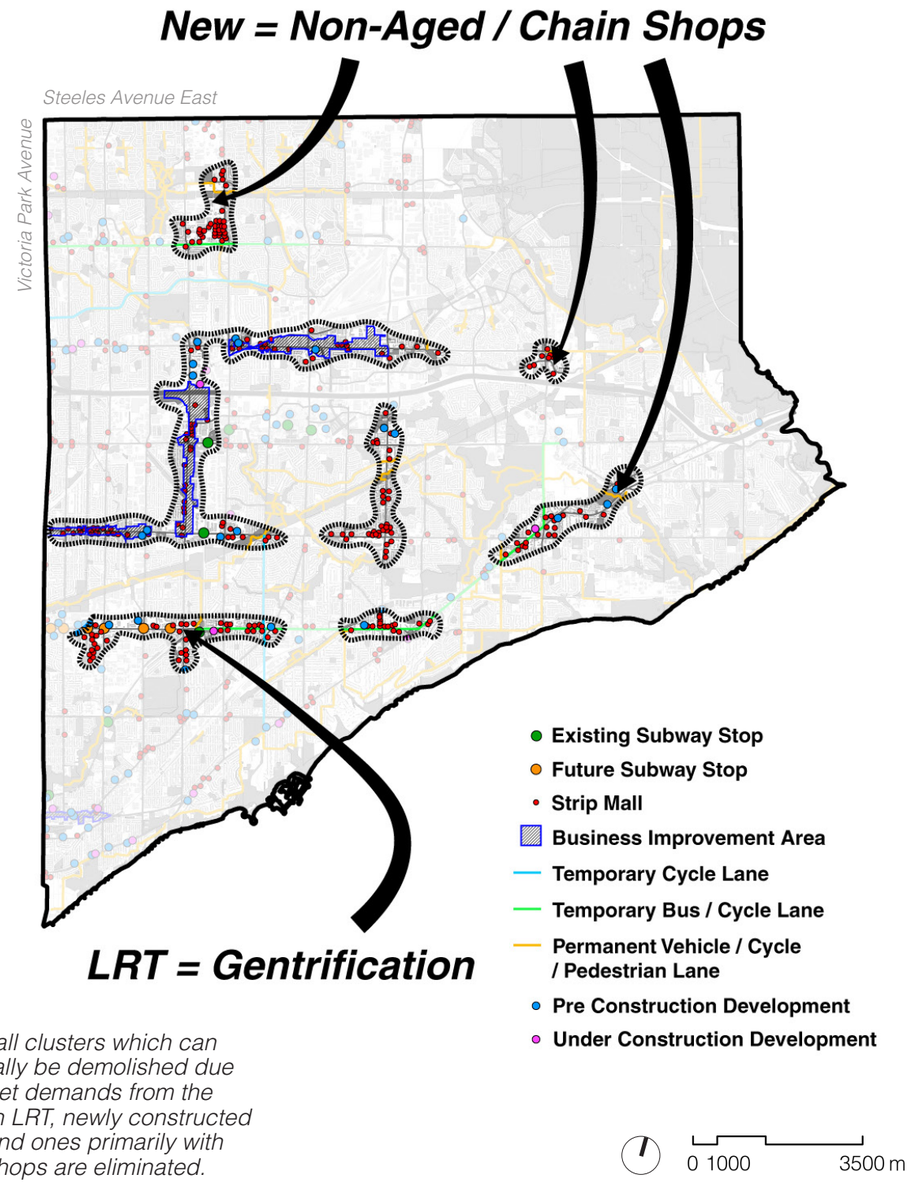
Proposed Situation Scope

Based on the final force map from the present situation, the intervention scope for the proposed situation is identified using a top-down elimination method in the following map sequence. The sequence also establish the location of the proposed network which encapsulate identified strip mall clusters of interest.



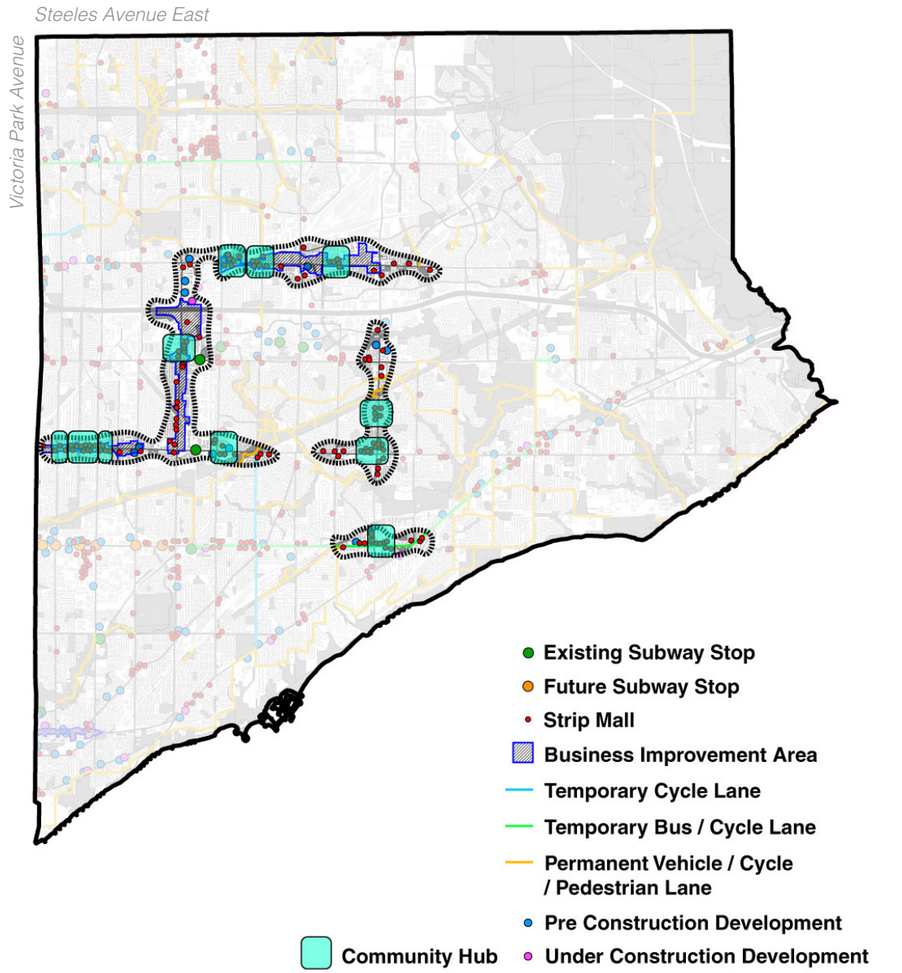
Strip mall clusters are identified based on proximity to existing cycle network and transit stations, being part of a BIA, and avoiding as much of the construction development as possible.

Fig.191: Proposed Situation Scope 1—Clusters; Scarborough, map



Strip mall clusters which can potentially be demolished due to market demands from the Eglinton LRT, newly constructed ones, and ones primarily with chain shops are eliminated.

Fig.192: Proposed Situation Scope 2—Cluster Reduction; Scarborough, map



Community hubs are designated where micro clusters of strip malls are across each other forming a heightened destination.

Fig.193: Proposed Situation Scope 3—Community Hubs; Scarborough, map

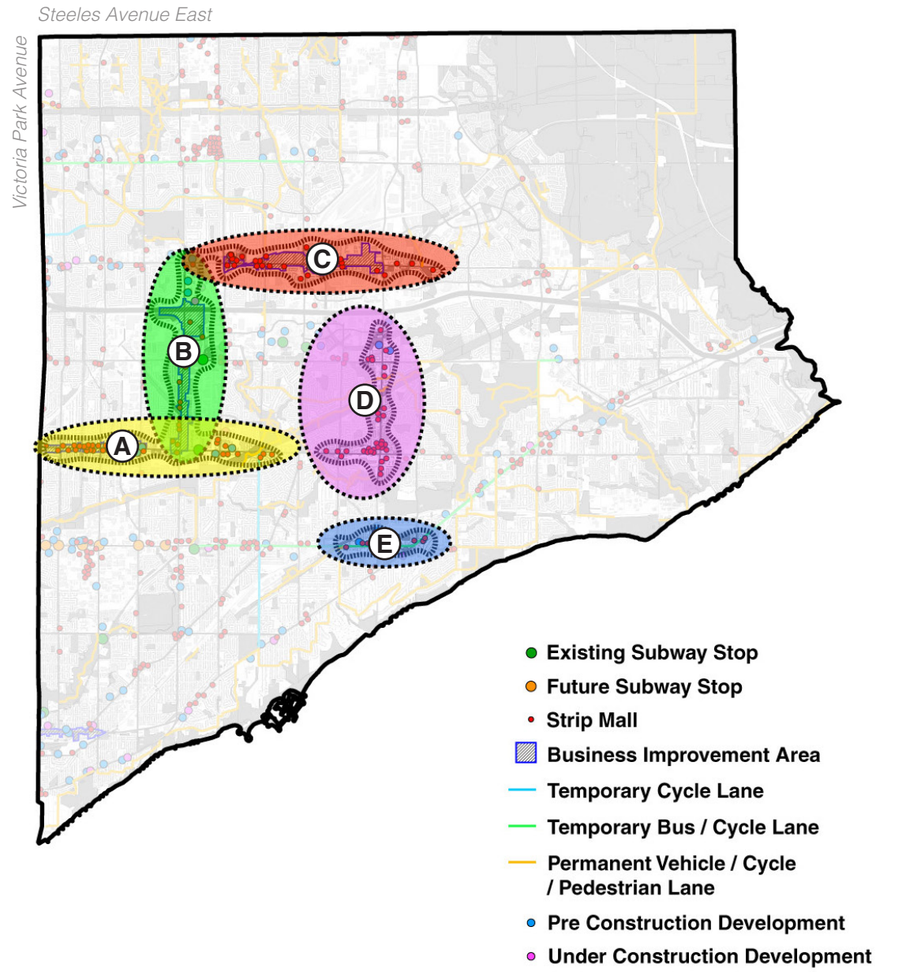
A
Wexford Heights BIA— a Gateway to Scarborough from Toronto with Pluralistic Shops.

B
Kennedy Road BIA—Industrial Opportunities i.e. Home Furnishing.

C
Sheppard East Village BIA— Chinese and Other East Asian Hub.

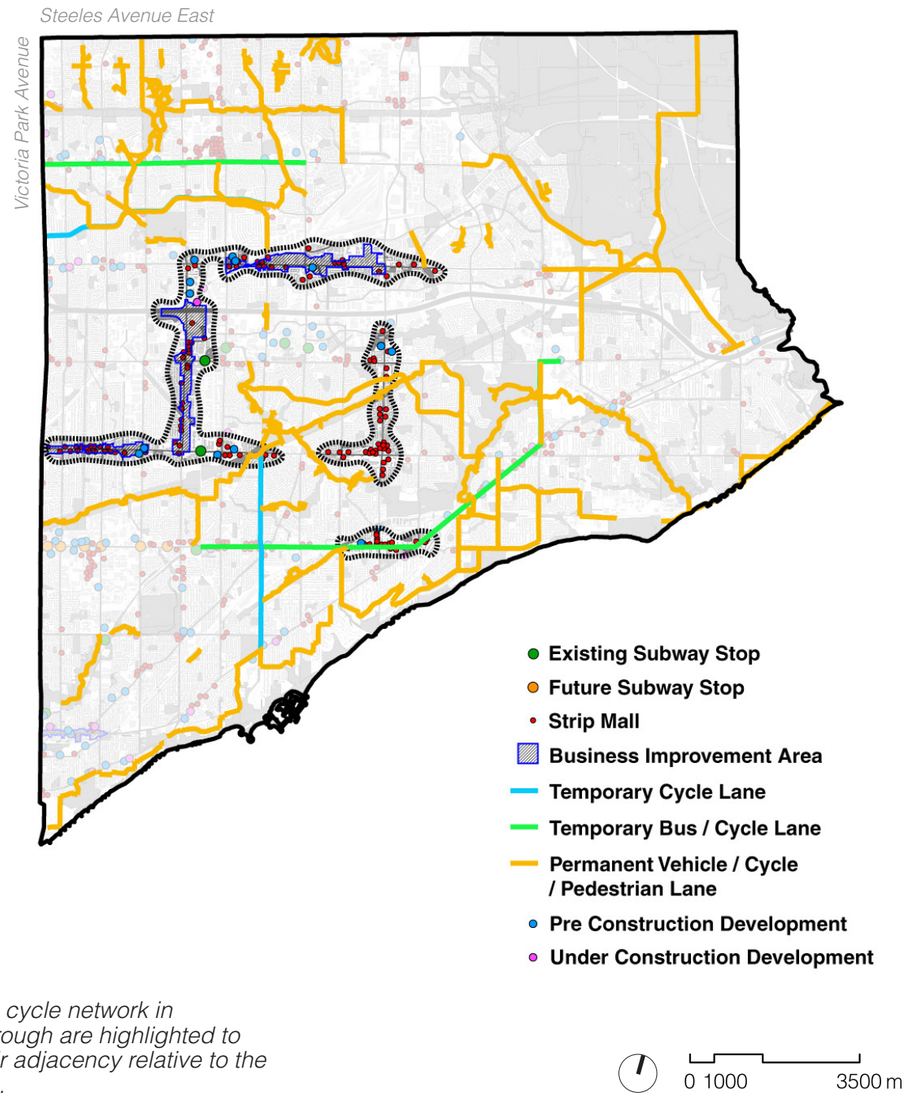
D
Indian Destination— Concentration of an Indian Retail Landscape like Food, Clothing and Services.

E
Muslim Community— a Variety of Halal Retail Shops along with a strip mall Mosque.



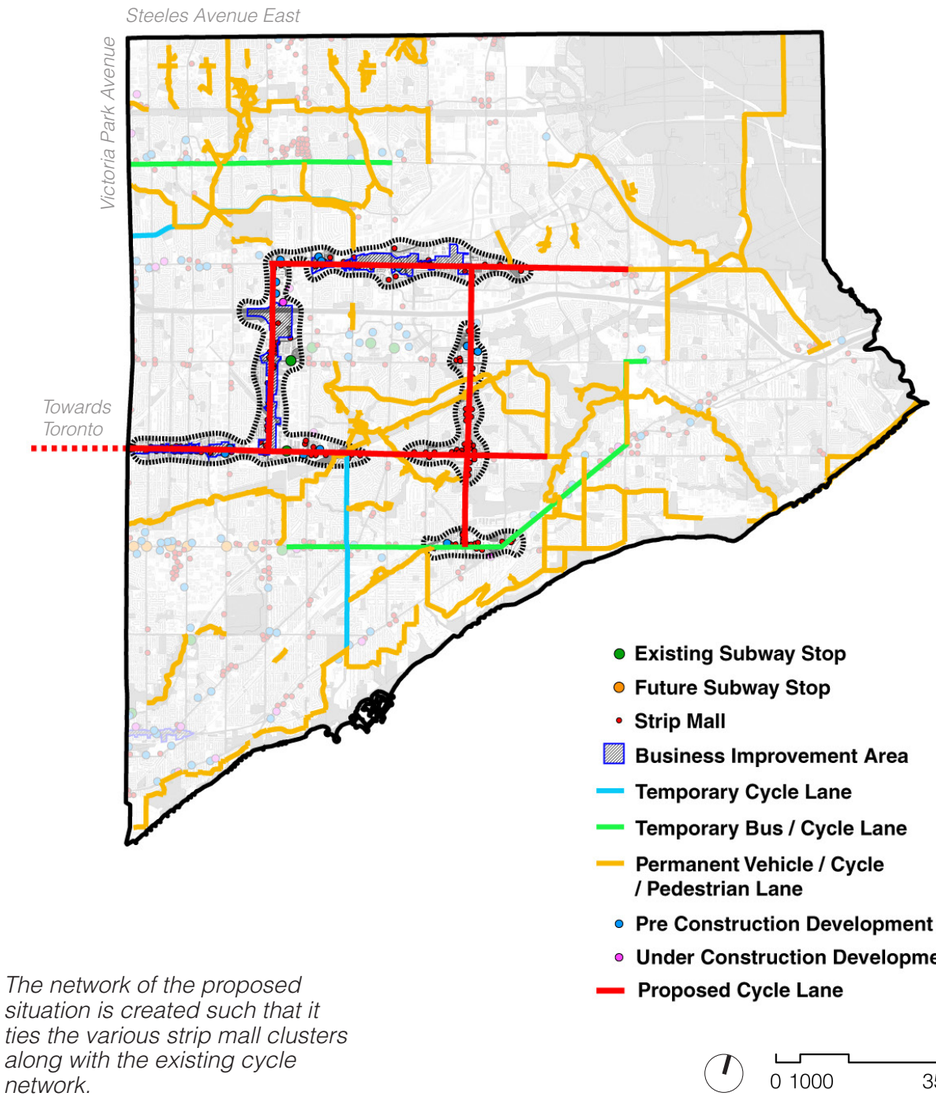
Primary characteristics of each cluster is identified to understand them better.

Fig.194: Proposed Situation Scope 4—Cluster Characteristics; Scarborough, map



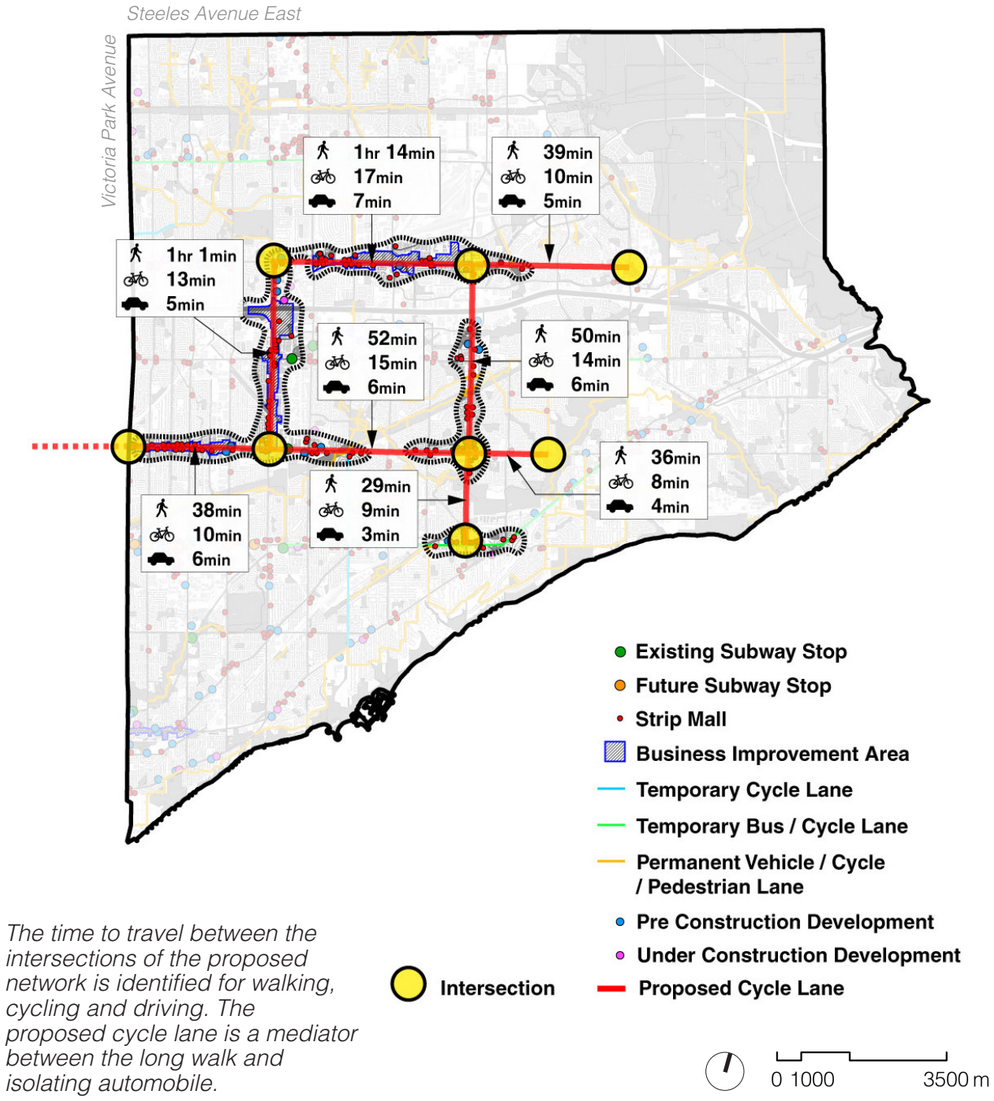
Existing cycle network in Scarborough are highlighted to see their adjacency relative to the clusters.

Fig.195: Proposed Situation Scope 5—Existing Cycle Network; Scarborough, map



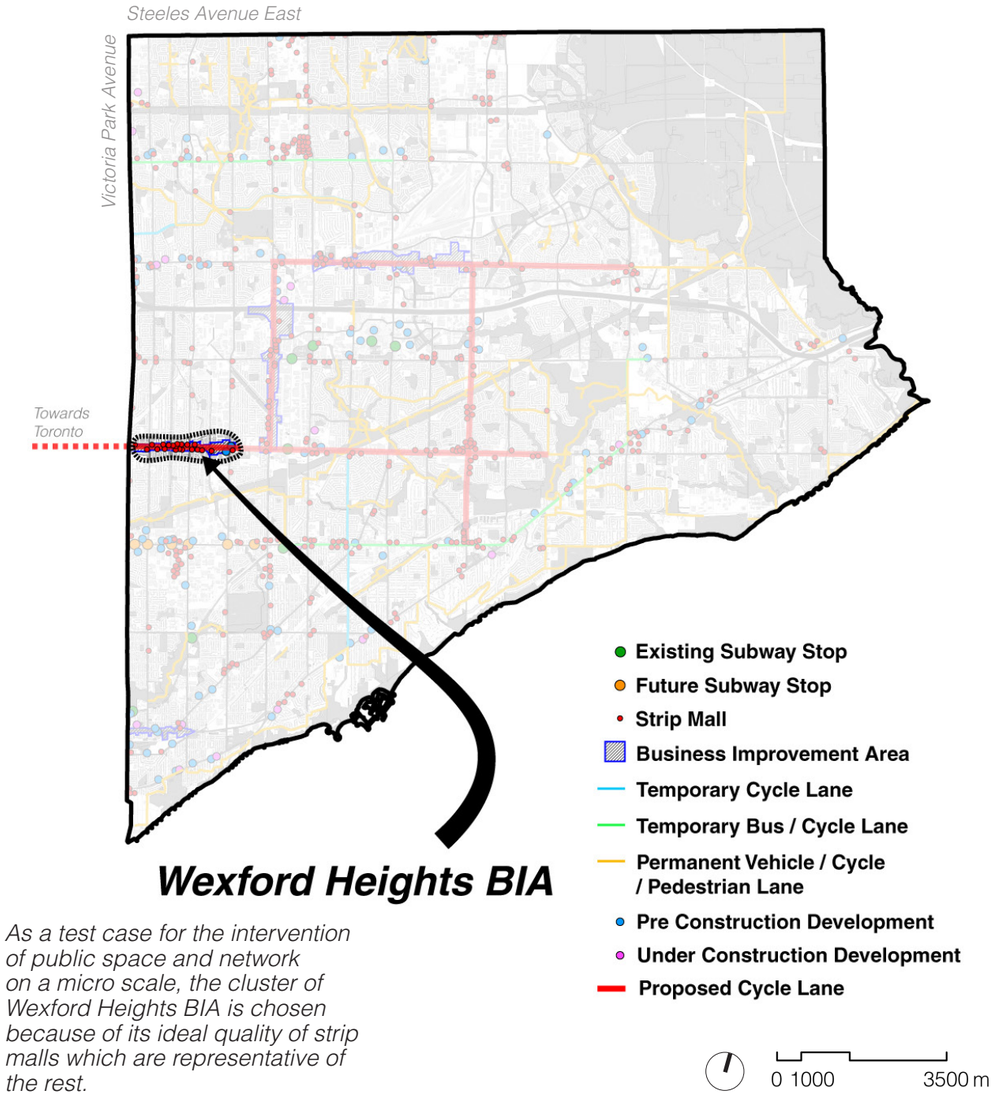
The network of the proposed situation is created such that it ties the various strip mall clusters along with the existing cycle network.

Fig.196: Proposed Situation Scope 6—Network; Scarborough, map



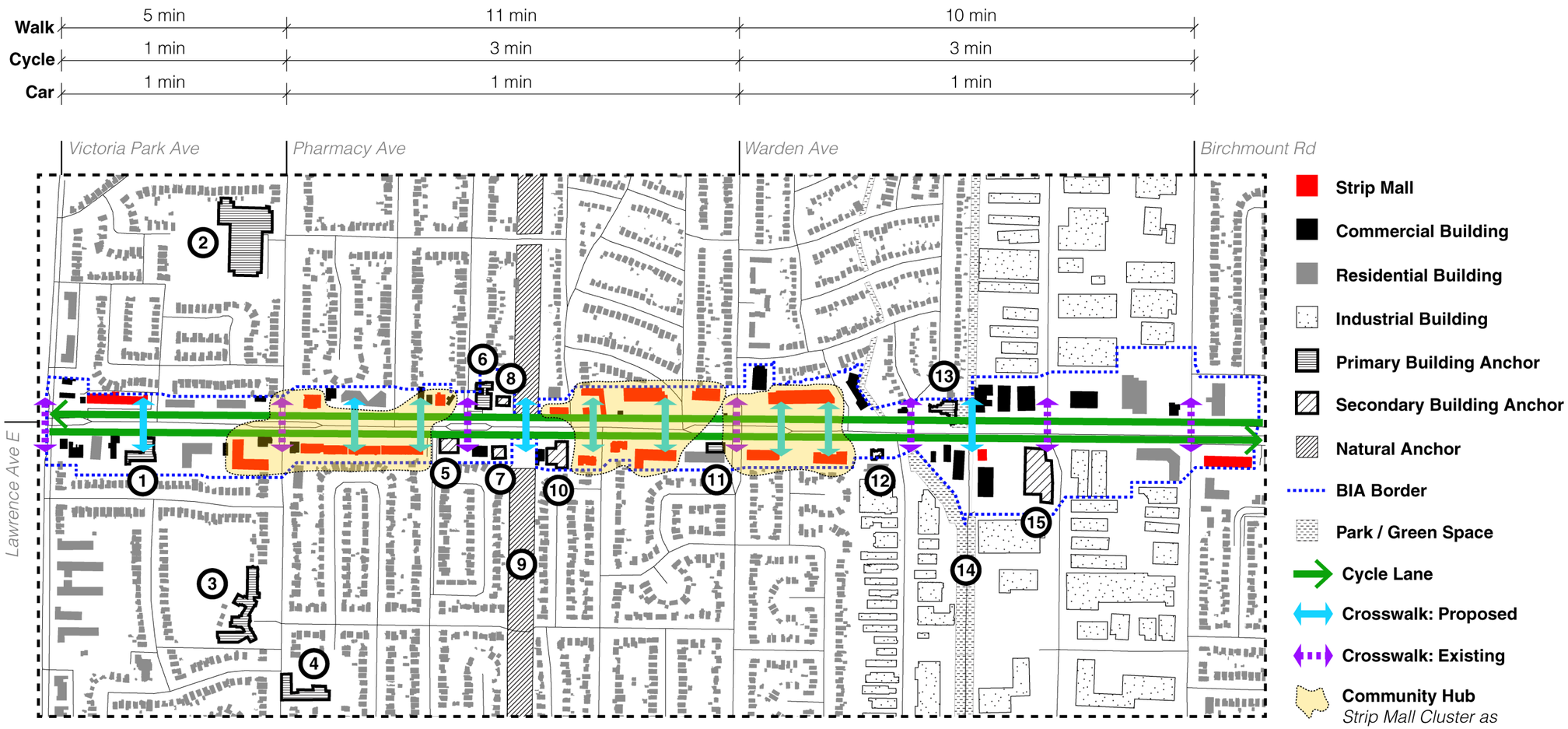
The time to travel between the intersections of the proposed network is identified for walking, cycling and driving. The proposed cycle lane is a mediator between the long walk and isolating automobile.

Fig.197: Proposed Situation Scope 7—Travel Time; Scarborough, map



As a test case for the intervention of public space and network on a micro scale, the cluster of Wexford Heights BIA is chosen because of its ideal quality of strip malls which are representative of the rest.

Fig.198: Proposed Situation Scope 8—Wexford Heights BIA; Scarborough, map



1. Precious Blood Parish
2. Wexford Collegiate School
3. Wexford Public School
4. Precious Blood Catholic School
5. Arz Fine Foods Grocery
6. Mount Gilead Seventh-day Adventist Church
7. Karahi Boys
8. Alexandria Cafe
9. Hydro Corridor
10. Paul O'Connor Funeral Home
11. Scarborough Citadel Community Church
12. Diana's Oyster Bar and Grill
13. Wexford Heights United Church
14. Taylor-Massey Creek
15. Food Basics Grocery

Fig.199: Wexford Heights BIA 1; Scarborough, map

On a closer level, the map of Wexford Heights BIA reveals the site features like school buildings and the building types—which are mainly commercial—on the arterial roads. Besides the existing conditions, the proposed features include, community hubs, crosswalks and cycle lanes which is a part of the larger network. The idea of the network is that it weaves into site features like green spaces at a macro scale.



Fig.200: Wexford Heights BIA 2; Scarborough, axonometric

The overall density of the area is low since the height of the buildings are typically one or few stories tall, besides the few residential towers. Generally, commercial spaces take the arterial frontage while the residential single family homes are behind it in cul-de-sac neighbourhoods. As a test case for the proposed situation's public space—which is a part of the larger network and community hub system—Wexford Heights Plaza is chosen for its spatial capacity to be a model case.



Fig.201: Wexford Heights Plaza; Scarborough; 1977, photo

Wexford Heights Plaza was constructed around 1950s, and has always existed as a utilitarian destination for the surrounding community. The photo shows unassuming shops like local mom-and-pop restaurants, hardware and dry cleaners.



Fig.202: Wexford Heights Plaza; Scarborough; 2021, photo

Despite being over 60 years old, the condition of the building appear similar with shops that are of similar types when compared to the earlier image. While the dry cleaning shop is at the same location, newer shops with an ethnic flair or ethnic owners have evolved the strip mall's vitality to meet the demographic needs.



Fig.203: Popular Syrian Bakery Shop; Wexford Heights Plaza; 2020, photo



Fig.204: Signage Showing the Legacy and Evolved Retail Diversity; Wexford Heights Plaza; 2021, photo



Fig.205: Entrance Threshold Is Often Occupied for Conversations; Wexford Heights Plaza; 2020, photo

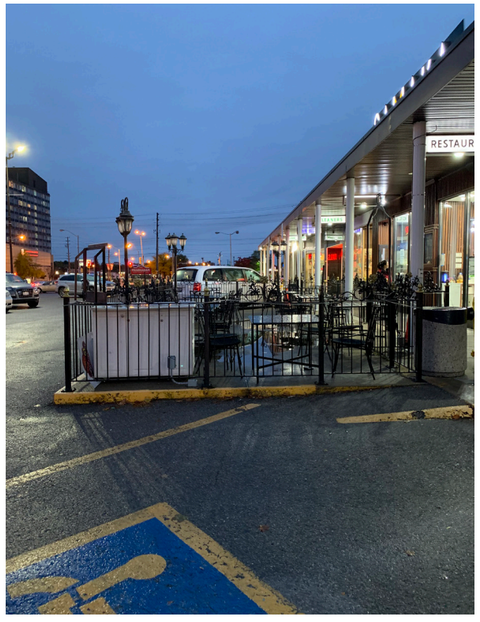


Fig.206: Parking Lot Is Overtaken with a Permanent Patio for a Shop; Wexford Heights Plaza; 2020, photo



Fig.207: Temporary Shaded Seating during COVID-19 Restrictions; Wexford Heights Plaza; 2021, photo



Fig.208: Temporary Shipping Container Firework Shop in the Parking Lot; Wexford Heights Plaza; 2021, photo



Fig.209: The Scale of Parking Lot Relative to the Strip Mall Building; Wexford Heights Plaza; 2020, photo

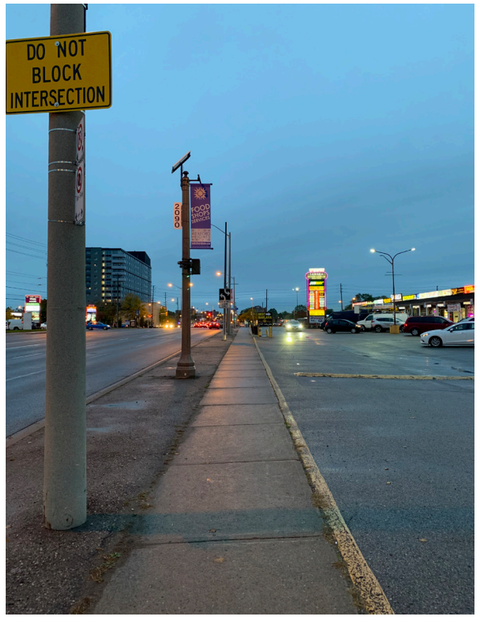


Fig.210: Condition of the City Owned Spaces Lining the Parking Lot; Wexford Heights Plaza; 2020, photo

Public Space Two **friends** grab a snack, after parking the car at the open parking lot.

Public Space Aunt Elsie's is a takeout restaurant combined with an extensive collection of **authentic** and hard to find Caribbean grocery items.

Public Space Network **Loitering** adolescents on **bikes**, getting their regular sugar fix after a basketball game few blocks down.

Public Space Friends meet up at the parking lot to **show-off** their car modifications to each other.

Public Space A **smoker**.

Public Space **Regulars** at the Barbershop.

Network Mother asks her son to run a quick **errand**.

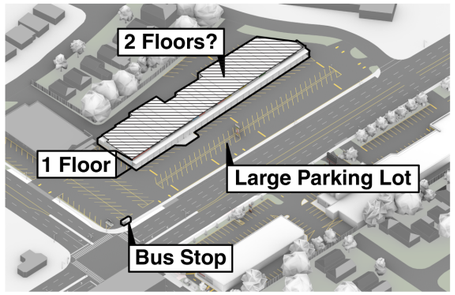
Public Space Post prayer at the local mosque's **parking lot**.

Public Space Ibrahim's **Halal** pizza shop beside the mosque.

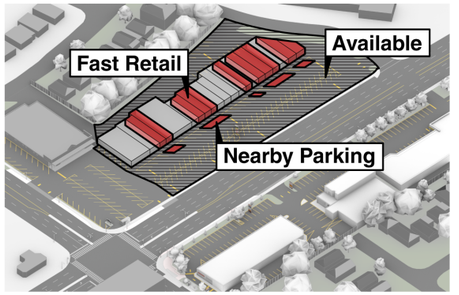
Public Space Group of adult male friends **leaning on their car** after a hard day at work.

Highlighting the allocation of public space and network for each of the present situation narrative tableaux. Keywords from the titles are also highlighted as they create the present situation's vitality and public life—meaning they are synthesized into the proposed situation.

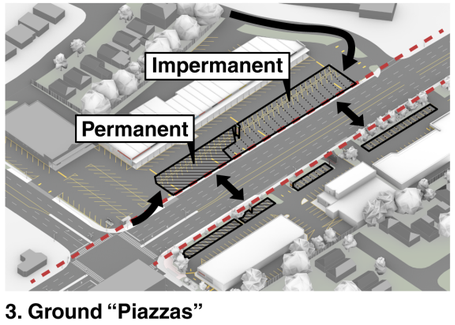
Fig.211: Application of Narrative, diagram



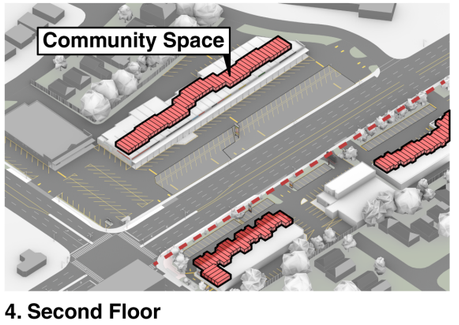
1. Site Potential
The large parking lot and roof of strip mall building has potential for public activities.



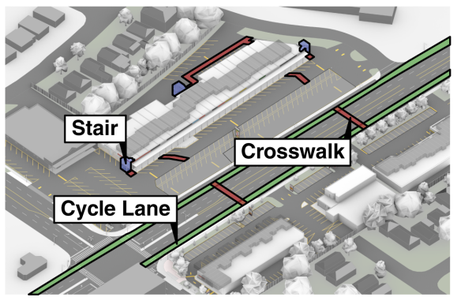
2. Parking Lot Intervention
Fast retail (e.g., fast food shop) need nearby parking unliked slow retail (e.g., barbershop).



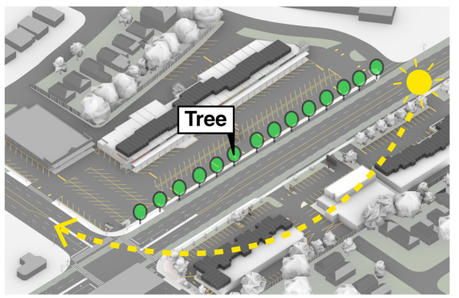
3. Ground "Piazzas"
Paths and edges establish parking lot public spaces ("piazzas") on opposite strip mall sites.



4. Second Floor
Roof can host community social programs (e.g., kitchen) for increased human activity.



5. Connection
Ground plane is connected with cycle lanes and crosswalks, and second floor with stairs.



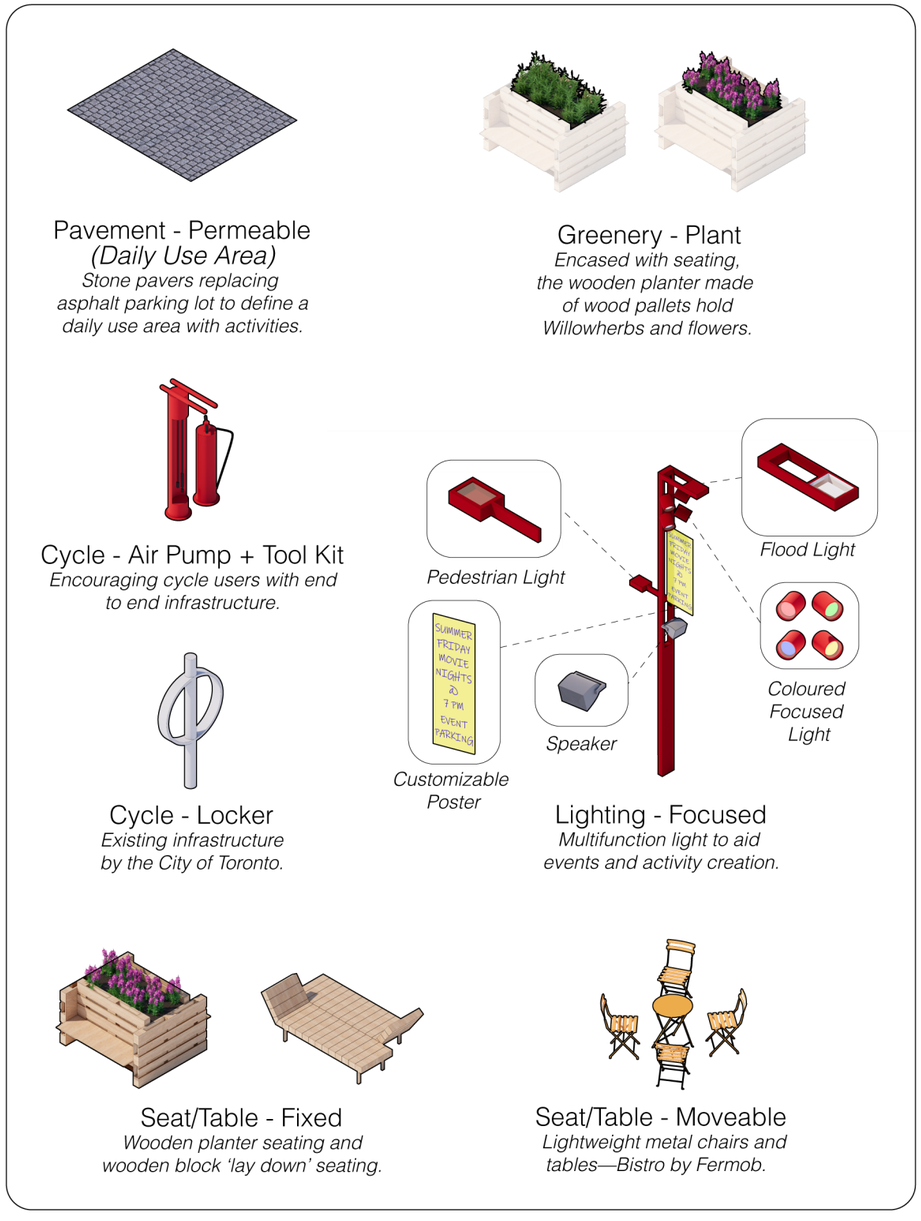
6. Sun Control
With a large southern face, the site can use trees to create a comfortable microclimate.

By understanding the physical condition in Wexford Heights Plaza and its vicinity at the present situation, the network and public spaces for the proposed situation are conceptually established.

Fig.212: Spatial Organization; diagram

Public Space Element - Long Run Permanent
NTS

city funded

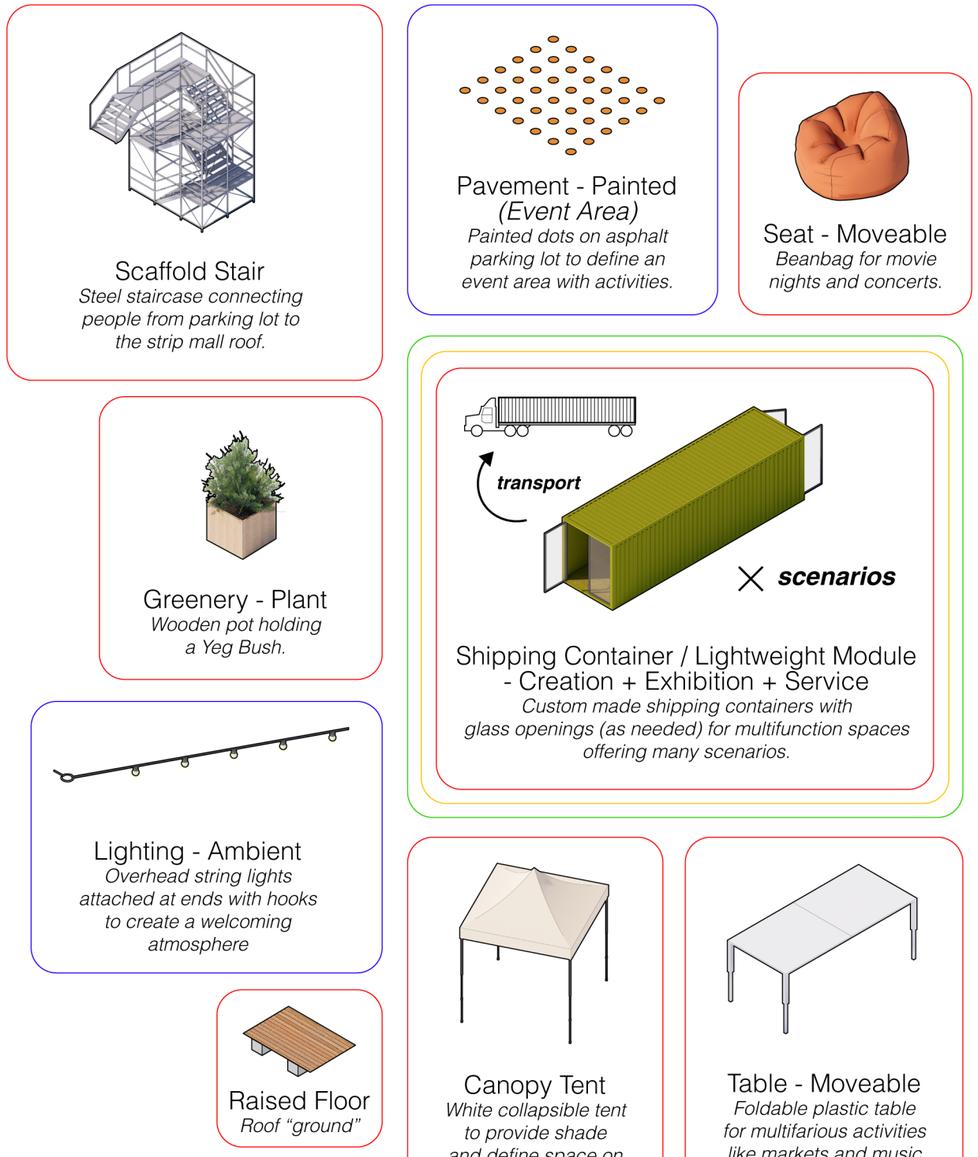


These intervention elements remain beyond the life of the strip mall.

Fig.213: Intervention List 1; diagram

Public Space Element - Long Run Impermanent
NTS

BIA funded
strip mall owner funded
shop owner funded
community funded

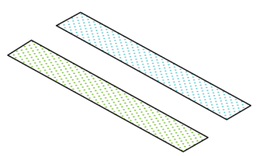


Temporal interventions—lifespan is the same as the strip mall they are in.

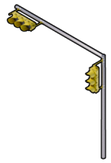
Fig.214: Intervention List 2; diagram

Network Element
NTS

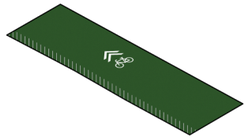
—— *city funded*



Crosswalk
Painted dual colour dotted path over asphalt road.



Signal
Utlizing Toronto's yellow signal light design.



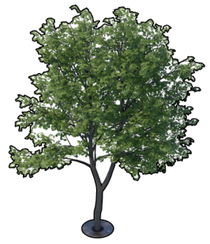
Cycle Lane
Green painted lane and a cycle lane logo with a dashed buffer separation from the road.



Cycle Protection
Bolted reflective white plastic stick for safety.



Greenery - Plant
Concrete planter with Brown's Yew plant on the road median to reduce speed.



Greenery - Tree
Maple tree planted onto the space beside sidewalk with a metal grate containing spot lights.

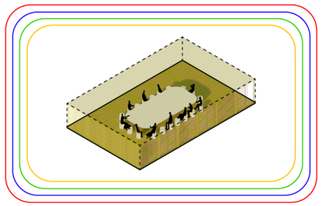
These intervention elements remain as long as the network exists or is modified.

Fig.215: Intervention List 3; diagram

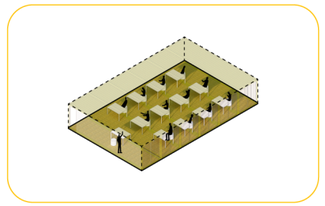
Scenario - Strip Mall Roof
NTS

—— *BIA organized*
—— *strip mall owner organized*
—— *shop owner organized*
—— *community organized*
—— *organically organized*

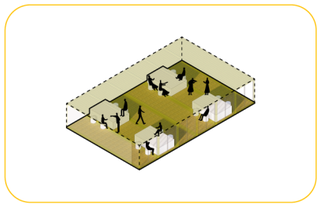
Daily Use Area—Creation
Indoor



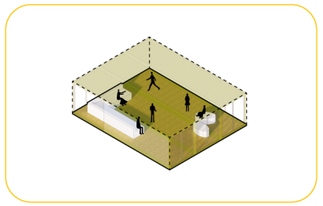
Meeting Room



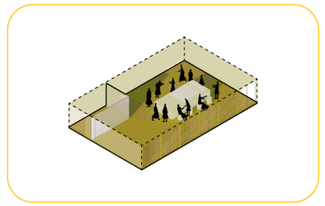
Classroom



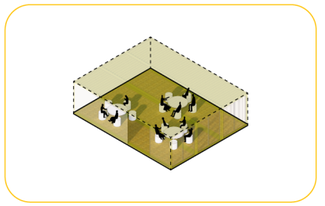
Makerspace



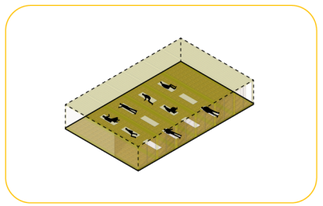
Lounge



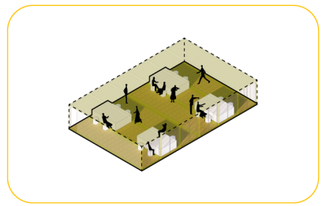
Kitchen



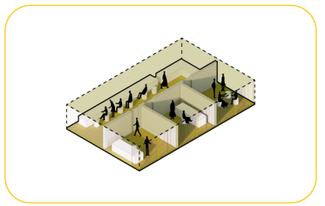
Dining Room



Yoga + Dance Studio



Art Studio



Music Studio

Daily Use Area—Piazza
Outdoor



Workspace



Informal Gathering



Planned Gathering

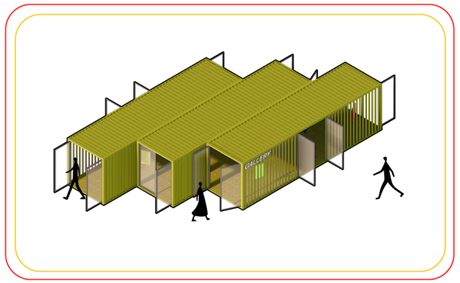
Most scenarios possible in each areas of the public space on the strip mall roof.

Fig.216: Scenario 1; diagram

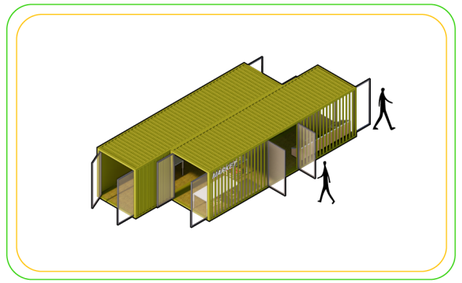
Scenario - Parking Lot
NTS

- *BIA organized*
- *strip mall owner organized*
- *shop owner organized*
- *community organized*
- *organically organized*

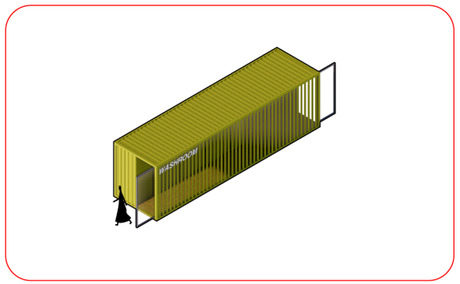
Daily Use Area—Exhibition + Service
Indoor



Gallery

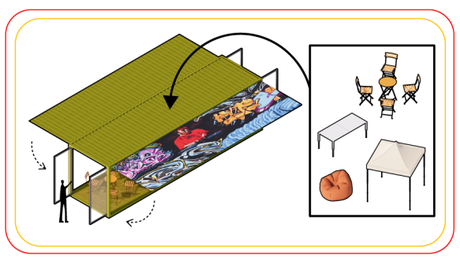


Market

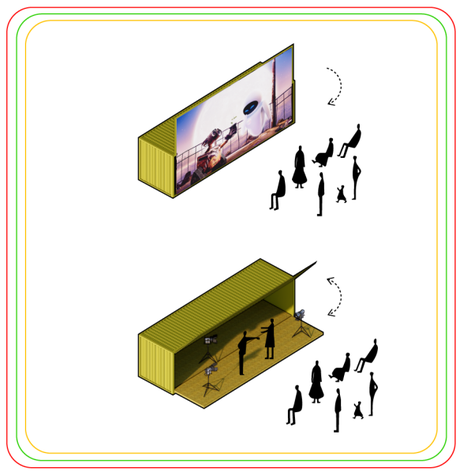


Washroom (Gender Neutral)

Event Area—Exhibition + Service
Indoor



Storage



Movie + Stage

Most scenarios possible in each areas of the public space parking lot indoor spaces.
Fig.217: Scenario 2; diagram

Scenario - Parking Lot
NTS

- *BIA organized*
- *strip mall owner organized*
- *shop owner organized*
- *community organized*
- *organically organized*

Daily Use Area—Piazza
Outdoor



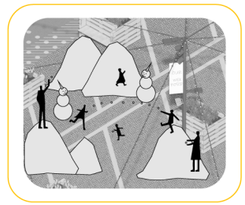
Market



Informal Gathering



Art Night



Snow Fight



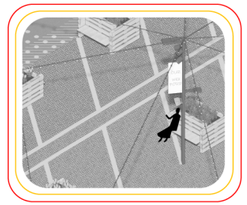
Exercise Meetup



Cookout

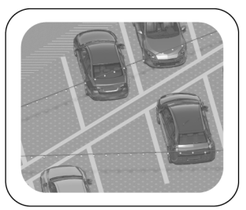


Music / Dance



Boring Day

Event Area—Piazza
Outdoor



Parking



Art Night



Snow Fight



Market

Most scenarios possible in each areas of the public space in the parking lot outdoor spaces.
Fig.218: Scenario 3; diagram



Fig.219: Present Situation; render

Drawing showing the present condition of Wexford Heights Plaza and its vicinity.



Fig.220: Proposed Situation; render

Drawing showing the proposed condition of Wexford Heights Plaza and its vicinity.



Fig.221: Network; diagram

Axonometric drawing showing the network as an element in the test case of Wexford Heights Plaza.

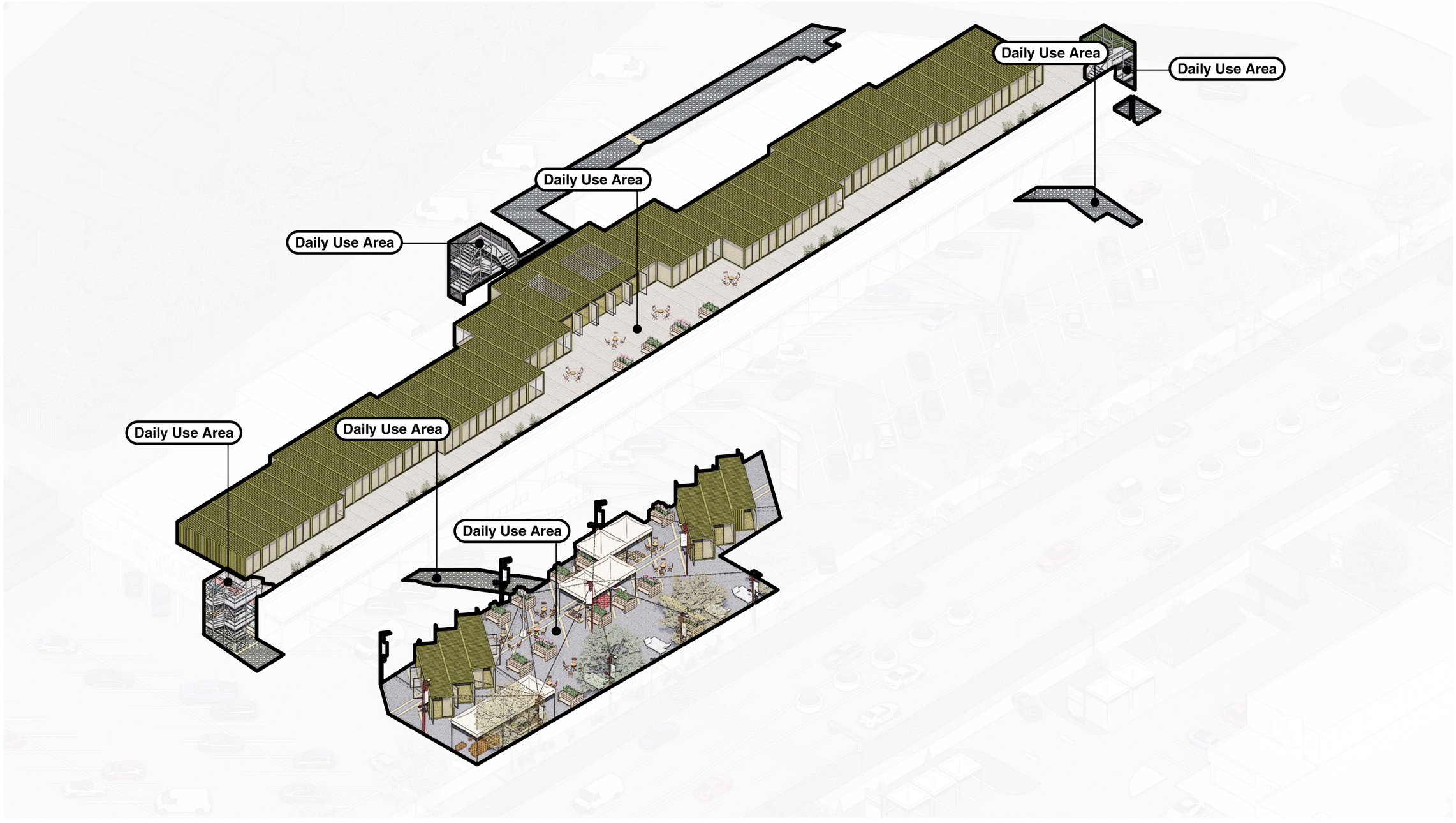


Fig.222: Public Space—Daily Use Area; diagram

Axonometric drawing showing the daily use area which are permanent public spaces in the Wexford Heights Plaza test site.

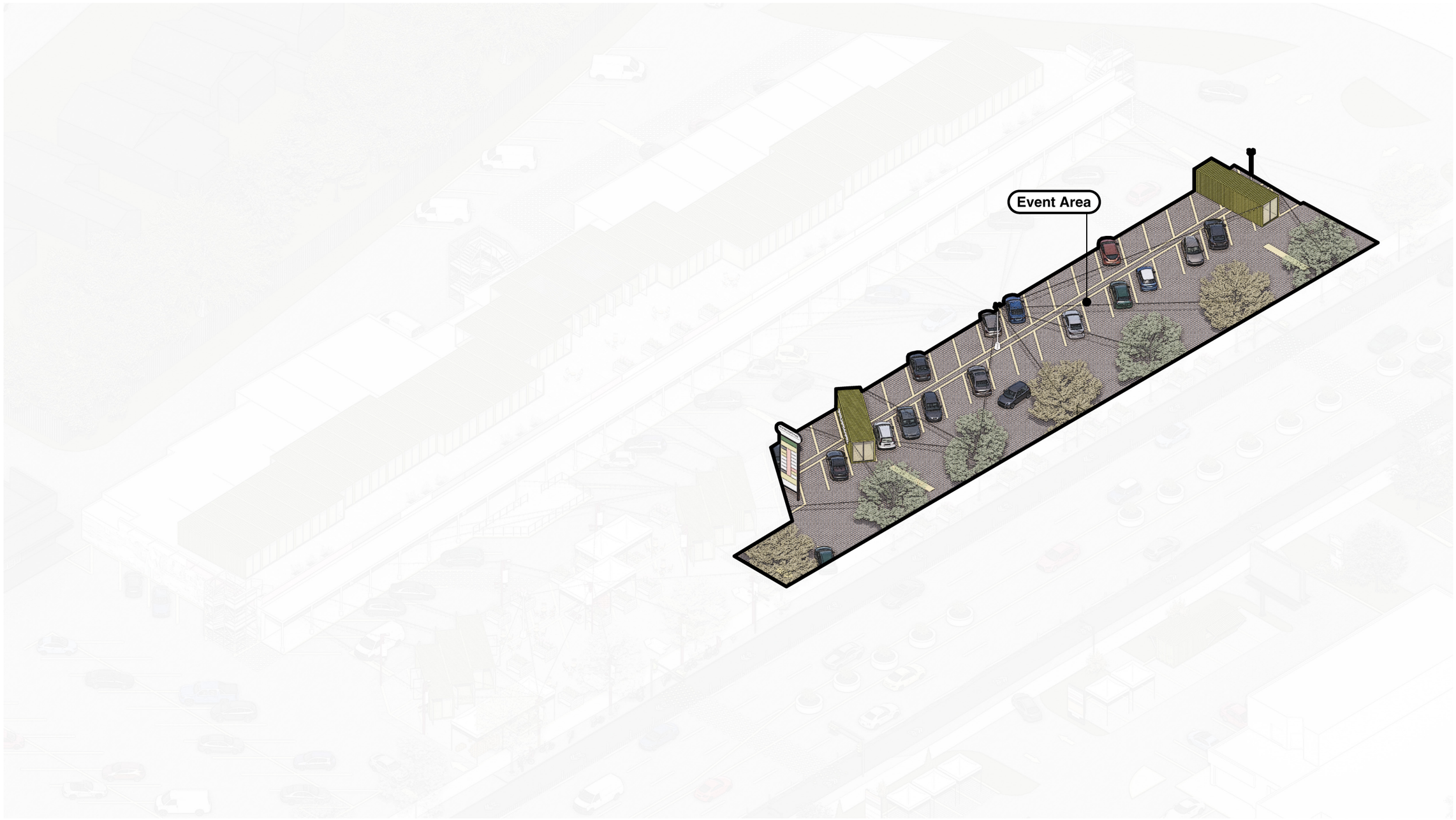


Fig.223: Public Space—Event Area; diagram

Axonometric drawing showing the event area which are impermanent public spaces in the Wexford Heights Plaza test site.

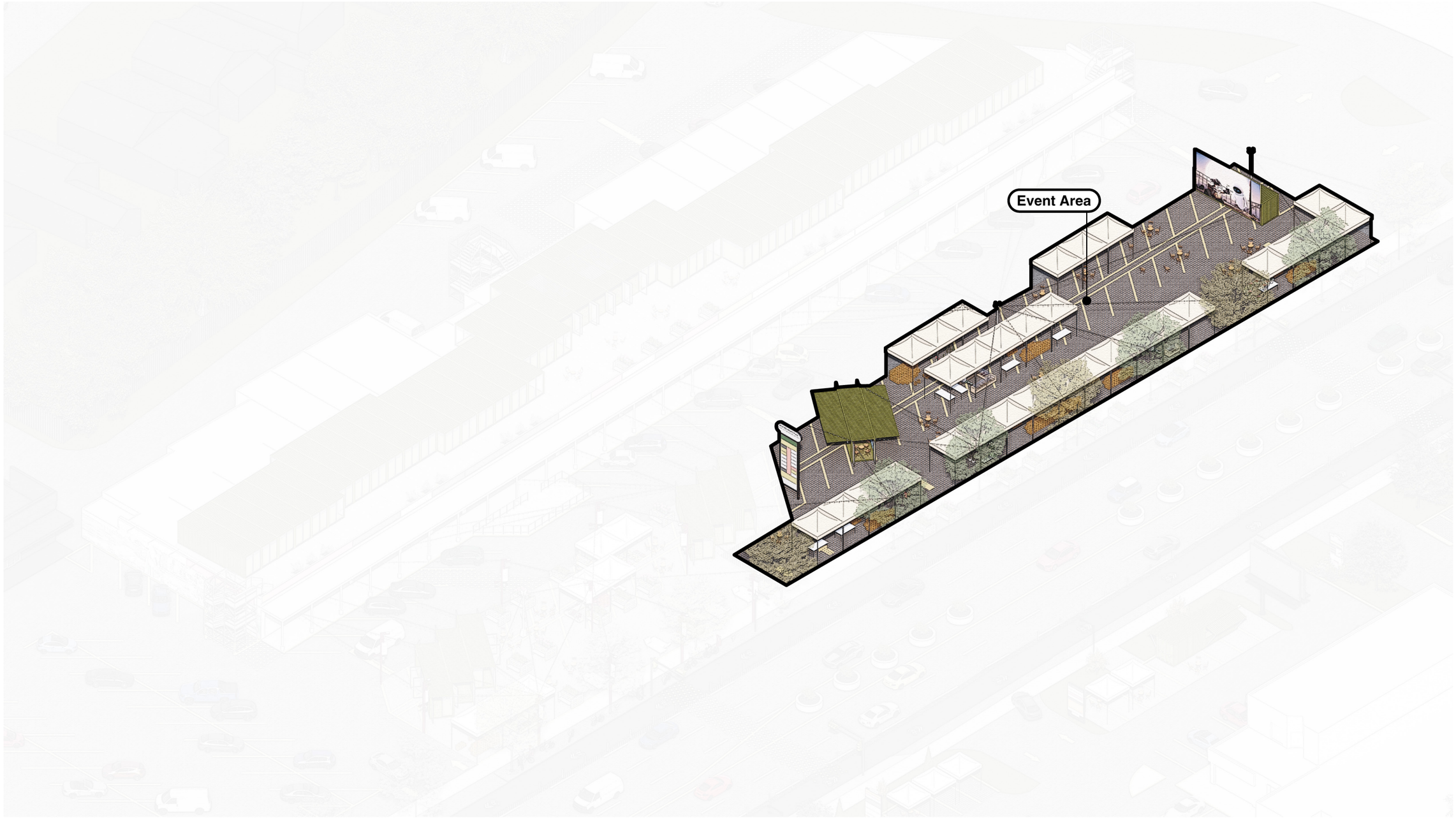


Fig.224: Public Space—Event Area; diagram

Axonometric drawing showing the event area which are impermanent public spaces in the Wexford Heights Plaza test site.

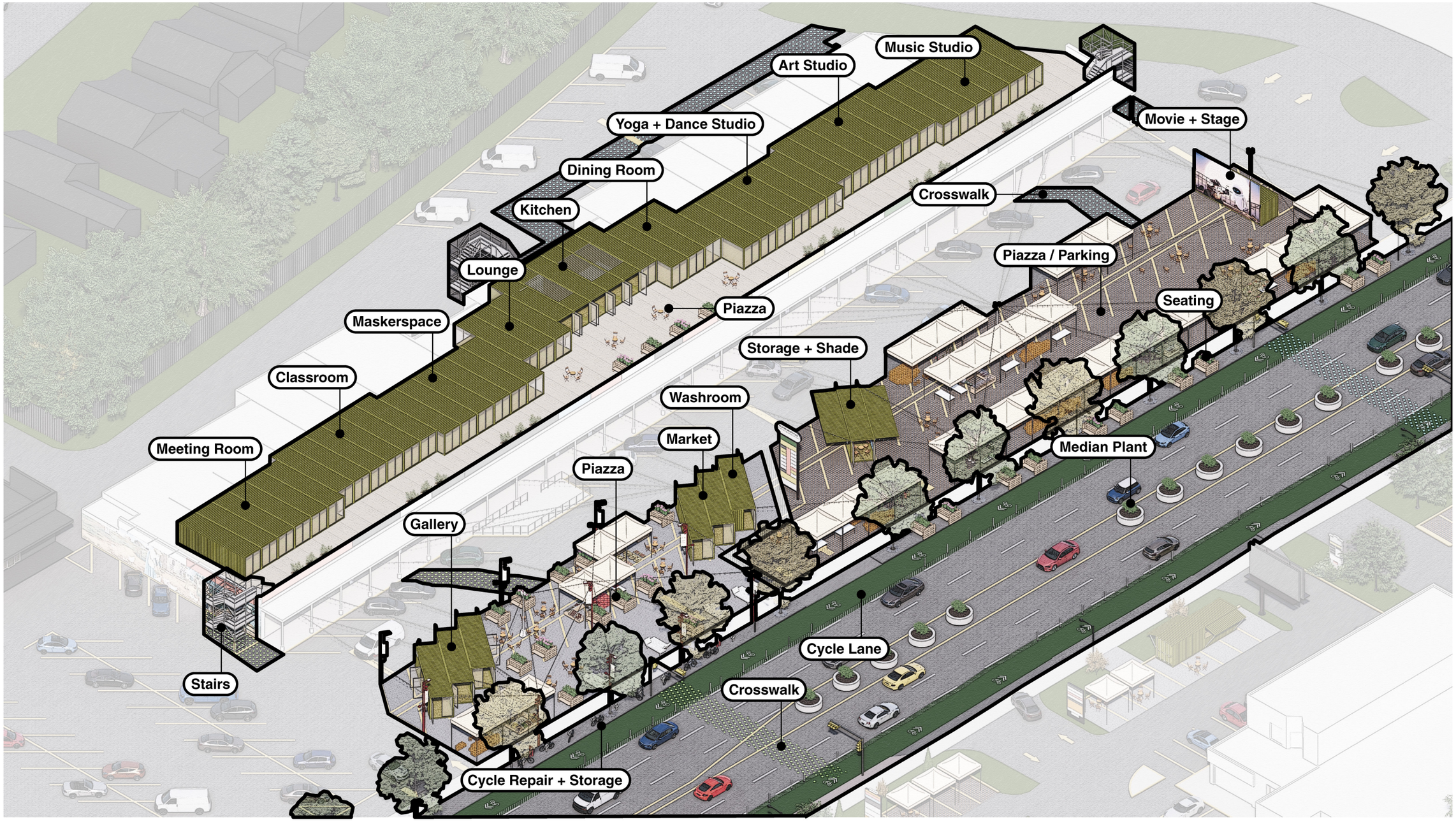


Fig.225: Network and Public Space—Program; diagram

Axonometric drawing showing all the main features and programs created by the proposed situation in the Wexford Heights Plaza test site.

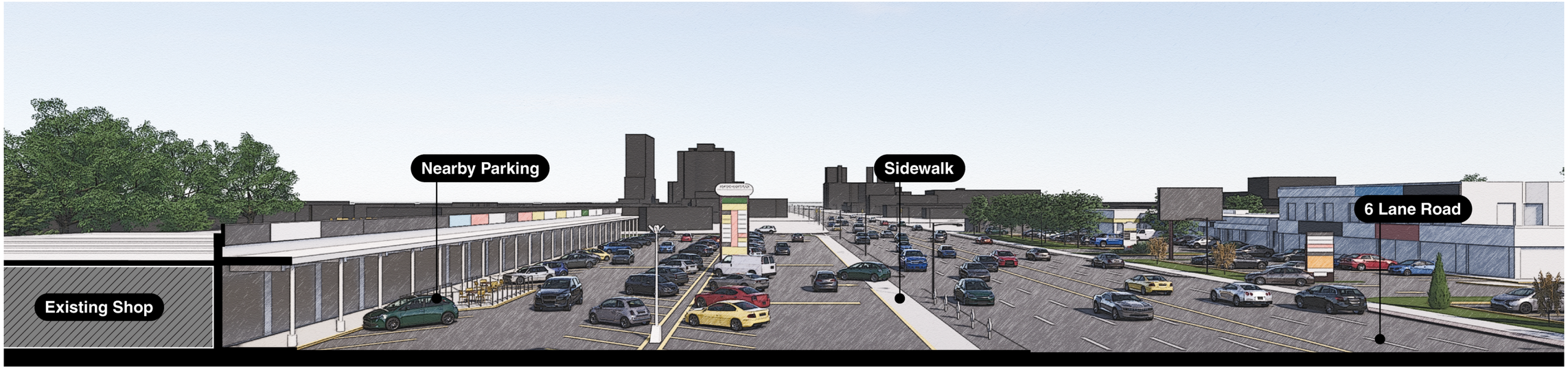
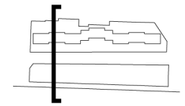


Fig.226: Present Situation; section



Fig.227: Proposed Situation—Daily Use Area; section

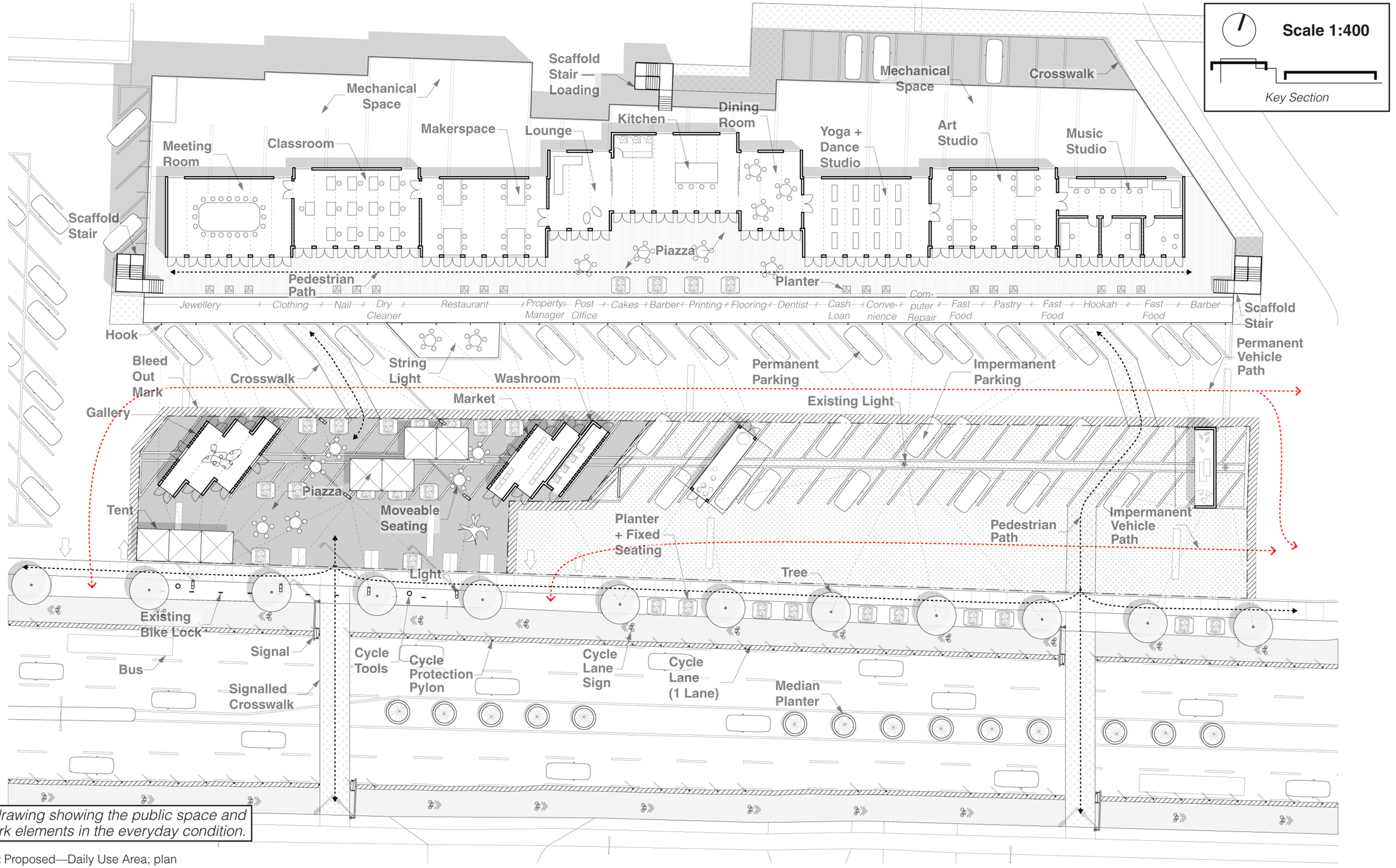


Key Plan

Present

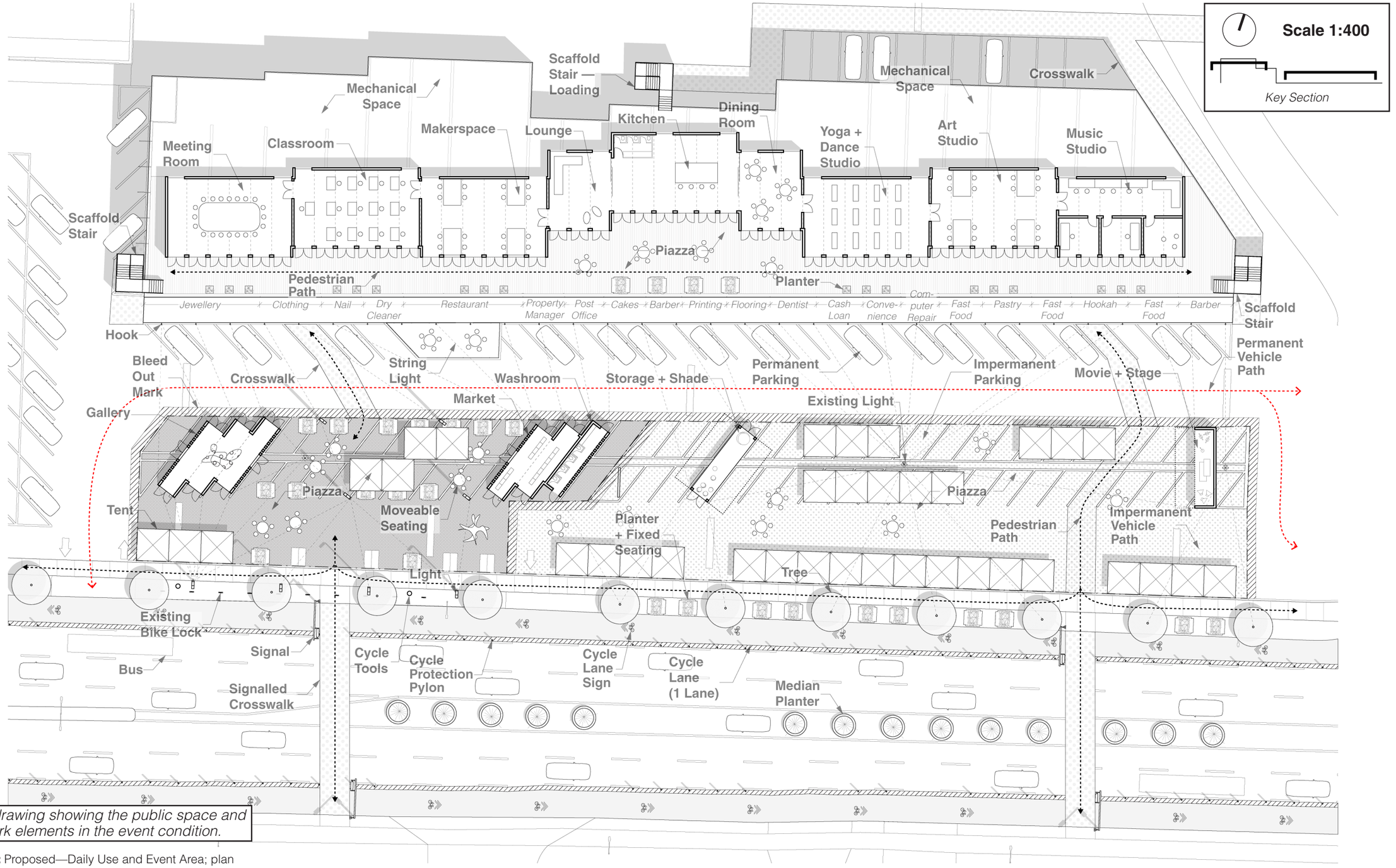
Proposed

Section drawings showing the present and proposed situations between the Wexford Heights strip mall building and the arterial Lawrence Avenue East.



Plan drawing showing the public space and network elements in the everyday condition.

Fig.228: Proposed—Daily Use Area; plan



Plan drawing showing the public space and network elements in the event condition.

Fig.229: Proposed—Daily Use and Event Area; plan

Who Manages It?

The following perspective drawing series point out who is managing key spatial elements.



Fig.230: Present Situation; render

The present condition of the Wexford Heights Plaza asphalt parking lot.

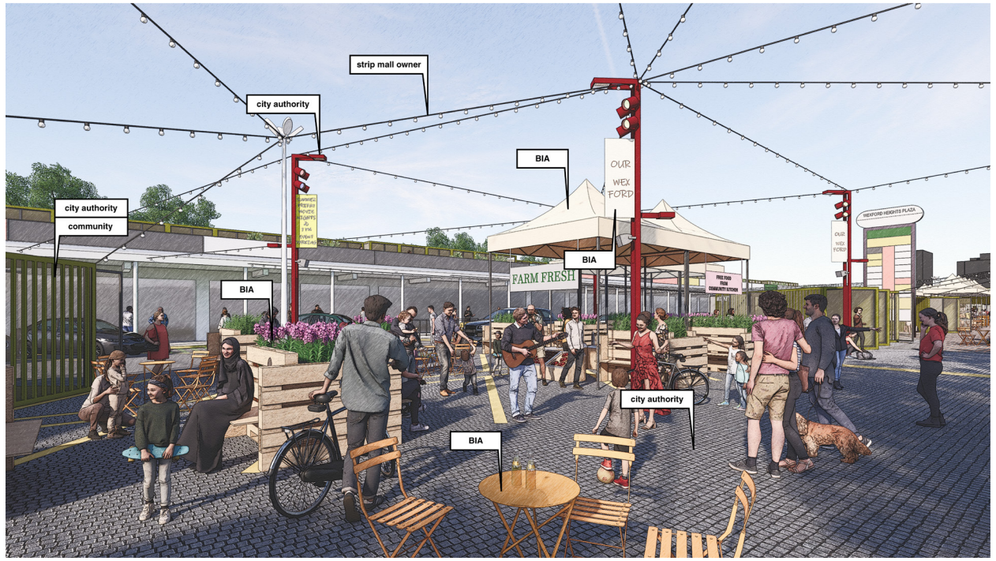


Fig.231: Proposed Situation—Informal Gathering and Market; render

The proposed condition of the permanent piazza with intervention elements that aid the scenario of informal activities like an impromptu guitar song with small pop-up shops.

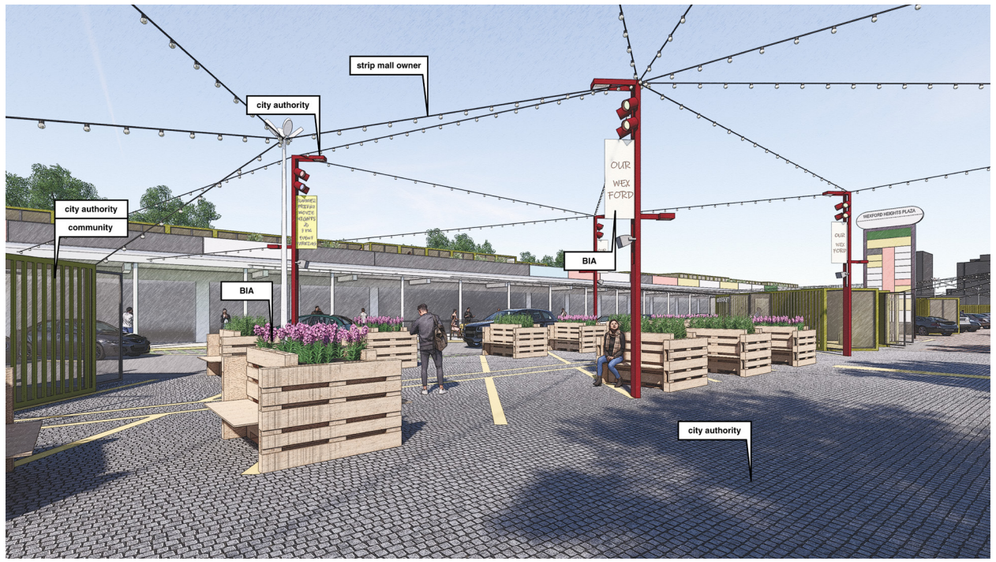


Fig.232: Proposed Situation—Boring Day; render

The proposed situation but at a time when people are at work on the weekday, but it is open for anyone to come and ponder about life.



Fig.233: Proposed Situation—Art Night; render

The proposed situation showing a community and BIA organized special art event. The workspaces in the roof can be used to create anything exhibited on the parking lot.



Fig.234: Present Situation; render

The present situation where parking immediate to the shop threshold is key for patron comfort and accessibility in a suburban fabric.



Fig.235: Proposed Situation—Market and Informal Gathering; render

The proposed situation where fast retail keeps the immediate parking whereas only one spot is taken away from a slower retail shop for a crosswalk.



Fig.236: Present Situation; render

The present situation of the asphalt parking lot in relation to the concrete sidewalk,the existing city provided cycle parking rings, and the 7 lane arterial Lawrence Avenue East.



Fig.237: Proposed Situation—Market; render

The proposed situation at the daily use piazza creates markets and open indoor programs like a gallery. Permeable paving replaces the asphalt parking to signify its permanence.

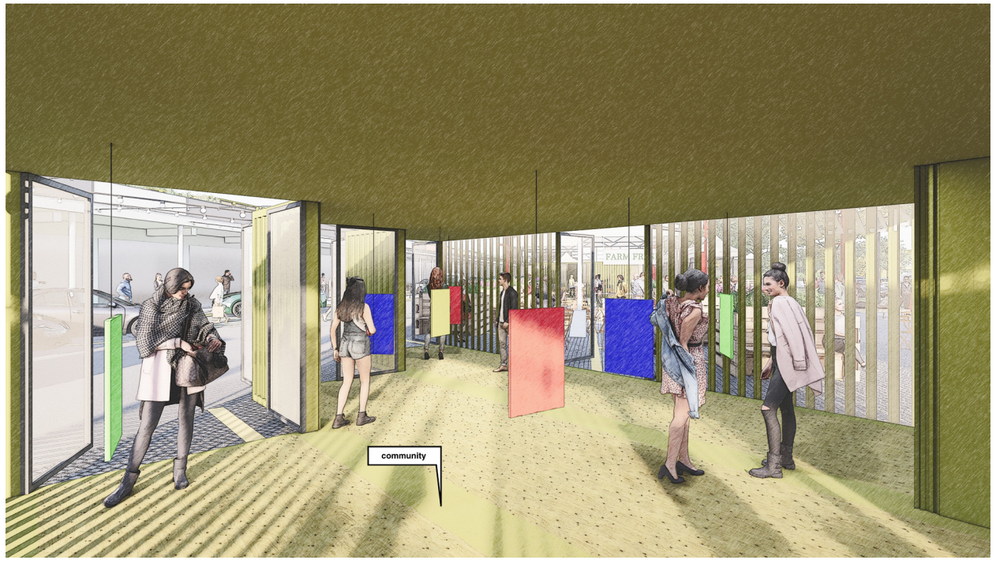


Fig.238: Proposed Situation—Gallery; render
Inside of the public gallery space for everyday use.



Fig.239: Proposed Situation—Market; render
Inside of the interior market space for everyday use.



Fig.240: Present Situation; render
The present situation parking lot towards the east.



Fig.241: Proposed Situation—Parking; render
The proposed situation parking lot with paint on the existing asphalt entails that the parking spaces remain but has the potential for activities during planned events.



Fig.242: Proposed Situation—Market; render

The proposed painted parking lot or “event piazza” can host multifarious conditions like a market.

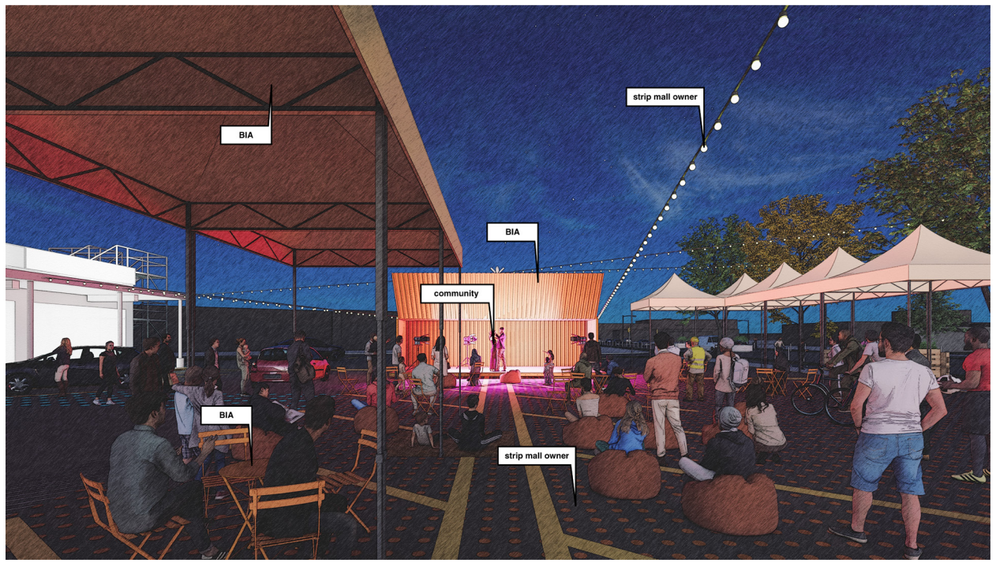


Fig.243: Proposed Situation—Concert; render

The proposed “event piazza” can also host a planned concert when the stationed shipping container module transforms into a stage.

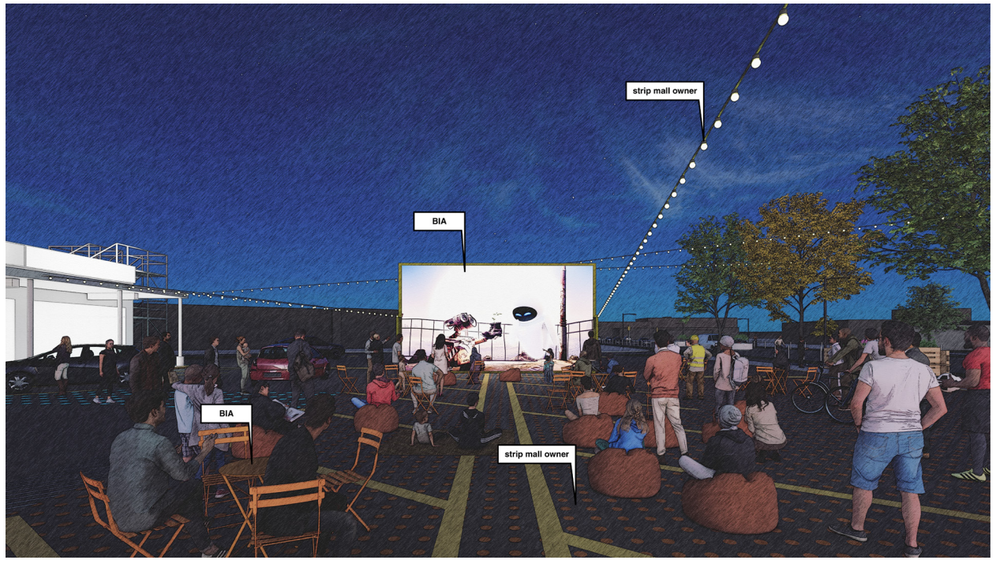


Fig.244: Proposed Situation—Movie; render

The proposed “event piazza” can transform into a movie screening event when the shipping container module becomes a projector screen.



Fig.245: Proposed Situation—Snow Pile; render

The proposed “event piazza” can become a dedicated urban place to play with snow during the winter.

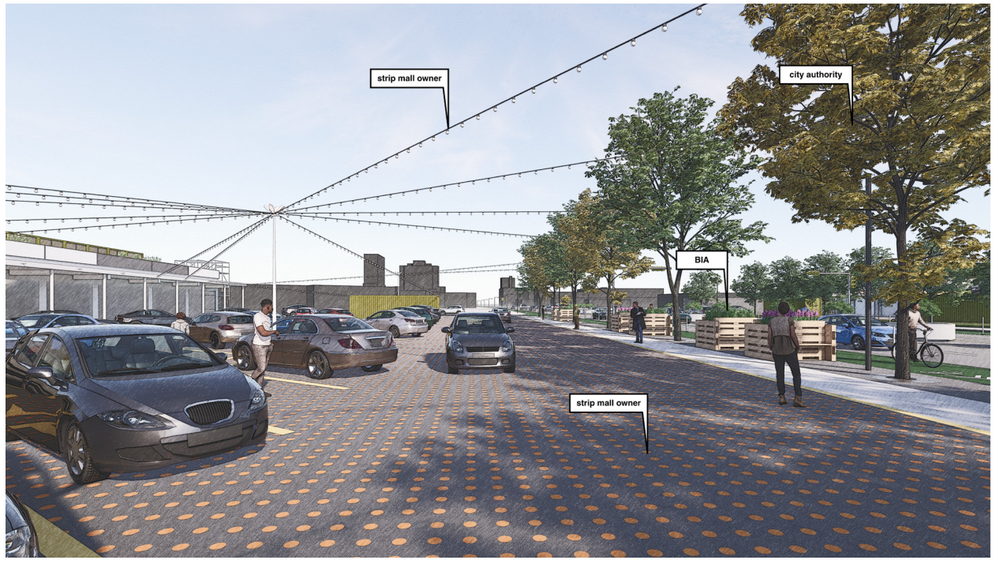


Fig.246: Proposed Situation—Parking; render

The proposed “event piazza” shown here is a parking during the everyday life.

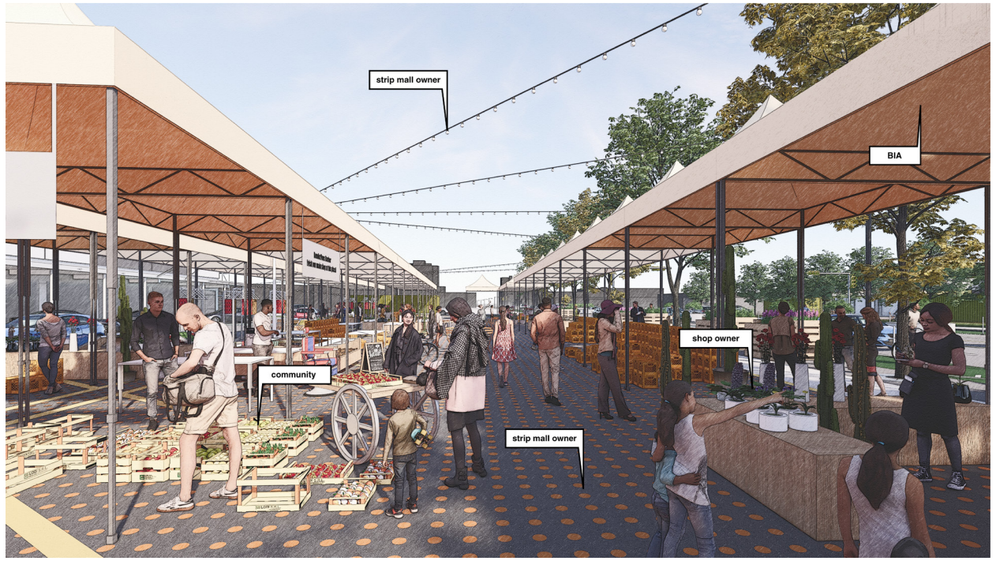


Fig.247: Proposed Situation—Market; render

The proposed parking lot or “event piazza” can become a market.

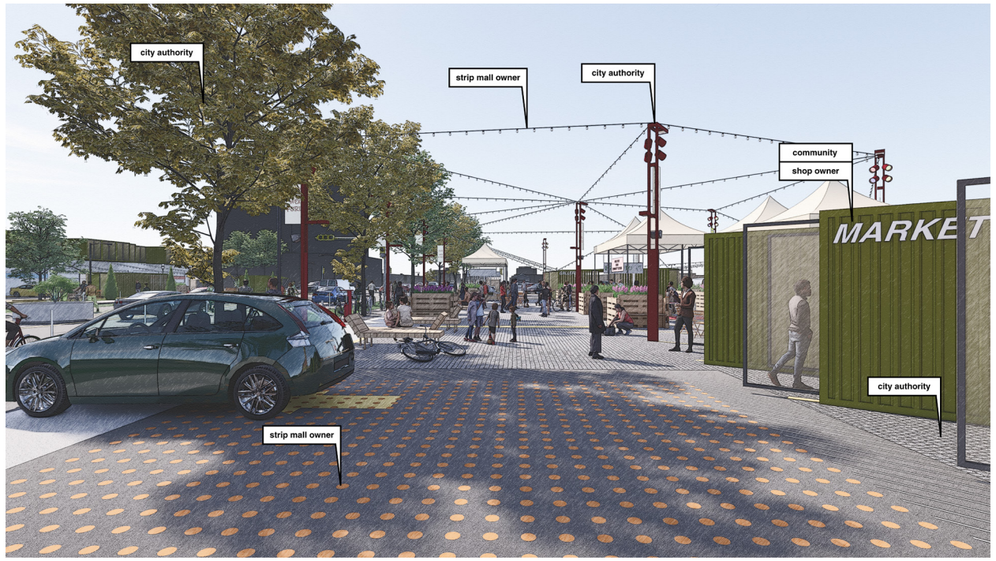


Fig.248: Proposed Situation—Parking; render

The proposed “event piazza” can function as parking while the “daily use piazza” hosts the pedestrian life full-time. The spaces are visually and tactically separated with paving.



Fig.249: Proposed Situation—Market; render

The “event piazza” can also become a part-time public space, depending on when the shop owners and community agree that its ideal.

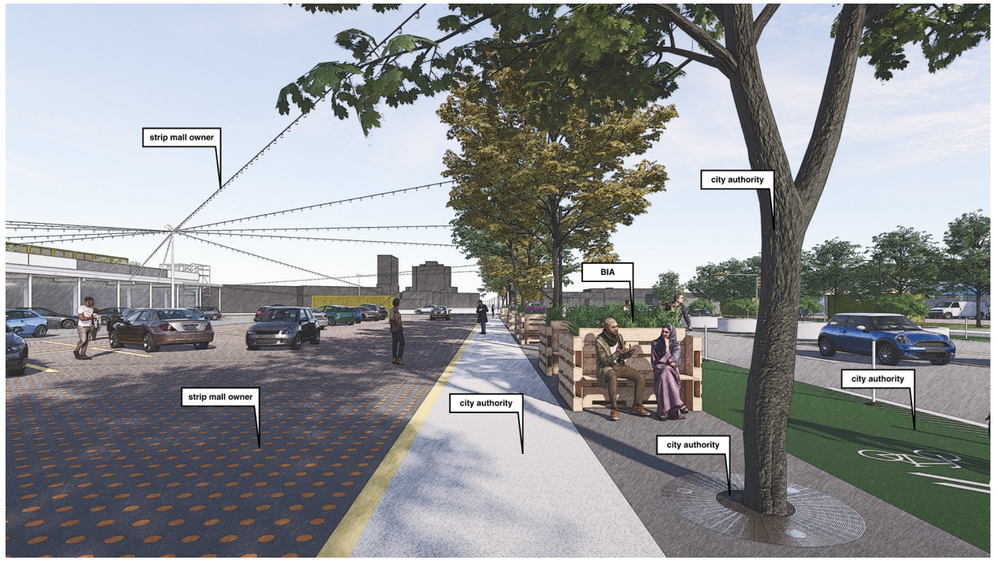


Fig.250: Proposed Situation—Parking; render

The sidewalk is a point where the city owned spaces begin and are always public spaces, irrespective to if the “event piazza” is parking or not.

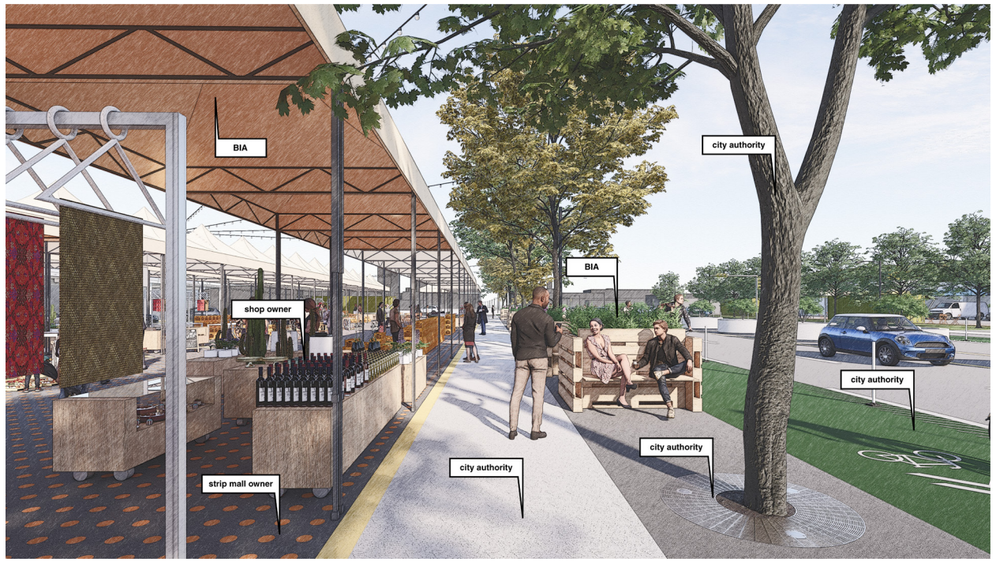


Fig.251: Proposed Situation—Market; render

The close connection of the “event piazza” market to the sidewalk public space creates a vibrant street edge.



Fig.252: Present Situation; render

Lawrence Avenue East near Wexford Heights Plaza is sterile, underutilized and cars speed too often.



Fig.253: Proposed Situation—Median Plant; render

The concrete median planters in the proposed situation can help to ease traffic speed while visually creating a more calming environment.



Fig.254: Present Situation; render

The present situation Lawrence Avenue East road is only dedicated to the automobile, even though all the lanes are not fully utilized by them.

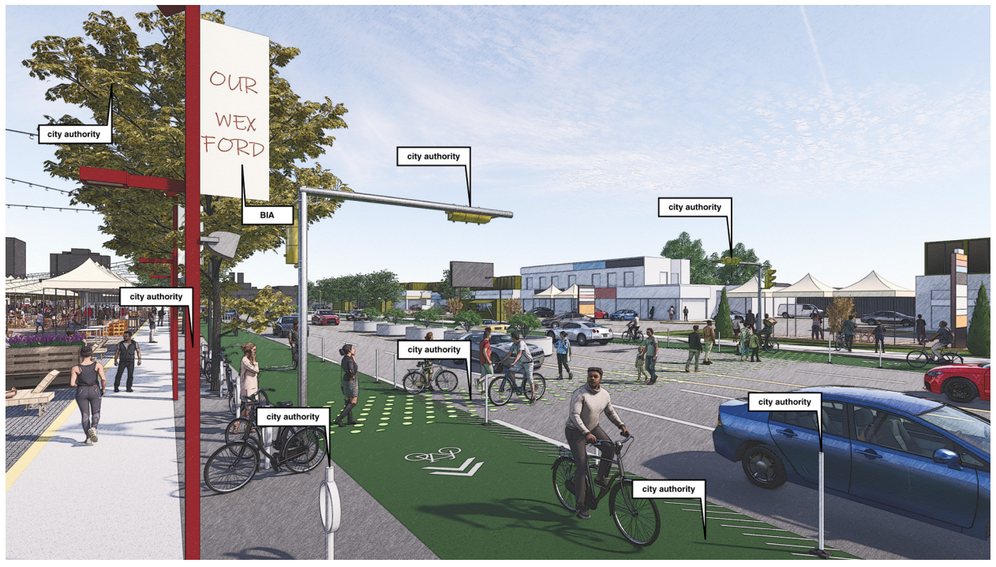


Fig.255: Proposed Situation—Cycle Lane and Crosswalk; render

The proposed situation transforms the outermost automobile lanes as cycle lanes through paint and reflective protection pylons. Signalled crosswalks connect strip malls across the road.



Fig.256: Present Situation; render

In the present situation, the city provided cycle storage is very rarely utilized.



Fig.257: Proposed Situation—Cycle Lane and Cycle Tool Station; render

The proposed situation's cycle lanes encourage regular cycling and are reinforced by maintenance infrastructure of air pumps and toolkits—providing a complete experience.



Fig.258: Proposed Situation—Scaffold Stair; render

The proposed situation contains scaffold staircases that connect the parking lot public spaces to the roof public spaces.



Fig.259: Proposed Situation—Roof Path; render

The roof contains interior public spaces like a makerspace and are made of light wood framing, emulating shipping containers in the parking lot for transportation by trucks.



Fig.260: Proposed Situation—Roof Piazza; render

The proposed public spaces on the strip mall roof create a lively rooftop daily use piazza.



Fig.261: Proposed Situation—Kitchen; render

The public community kitchen can be used as a gathering space through food and knowledge sharing. People can invite others from different communities to reinforce a social network.

Design Solution

By celebrating the present vitality and public life of Scarborough's strip malls, this thesis proposes a new situation—network of public spaces which can also be understood as community hubs. This re-imagination is achieved through permanent and impermanent interventions with indoor and outdoor conditions which not only enhance the everyday life but also create opportunities for events under a collective network of many strip malls. The design is composed of two parts, the network, and the public space (strip mall sites).

The network contains cycle lanes and related infrastructures, crosswalks, and greenery like trees and median planters. Cycle lanes are located on street occupying the far-right lane on each side which will be painted and protected with bollards and planters. Cycle lanes connect strip malls to each other and existing permanent cycle lanes which are primarily in the park trails. Crosswalks are painted and signalized and connect strip mall on opposite ends with no adjacent existing crosswalks. Median strips have planters to reduce vehicular speed. The network is a method to introduce a third form of mobility besides automobile and buses to engage cycling and walking as an option for active mobility. At the same time, the network adds health, environmental and financial benefits to form a physical connection amongst the strip malls which are reimagined as community hubs or simply, public spaces.

The public spaces located at strip mall properties are either on the parking lot or atop the building form if they are one storey tall. The indoor spaces are formed by shipping containers or lightweight modules and they are categorized as spaces for creation like kitchens, makerspaces, and studios; exhibition like markets and galleries; and services like a storage, meeting room and washroom. These are placed as needed at both the parking lot and the roof of the single storey strip mall building. The outdoor spaces are multifarious and are located on parking lots and the roof. Modules are provided for exhibition like a performance stage which transform into a movie display. Pavement areas are categorized as permeable to define a daily use area and painted for event areas, where the activities can spill into on occasional days. Canopy tents insert controllable ephemeral markets or simply shade and they occupy designated pavement areas. Fixed and moveable seating offers respite and social interactions. Cycle storage and air pumps invite cyclists. Focused and ambient lighting increases safety, navigability, and a pedestrianized mood. Greenery is offered by planters and trees which also provide visual respite and prevents harsh sun and wind.

Managerial challenges for design arise due to the contested nature of parking and funding. Permanent parking is dedicated in front of regular heavy traffic shops and areas not intervened upon with paving, impermanent parking is allocated in the painted event areas and parking is completely removed from daily use areas defined by permeable paving. Time is an important factor for the design, so it is categorized as short run and long run. In the short run, permanent elements are everything, but the market canopy tents and moveable seats and tables. While there are defined areas for daily uses and events, the intervention elements provide the user with flexibility to create their desired condition. In the long run, permanent elements are the permeable pavement, trees, cycle lockers, air pump, and focused lighting as these are projected to remain past the lifespan of strip malls. The public spaces and network collectively create diverse social destinations which realize the potential vitality and public life, while celebrating the existing vitality and public life of Scarborough's strip malls.

Future Situation

While looking at the present situation of existing vibrancy and vitality brought forth the potential to heighten them through the proposed situation, there exists various possibilities for the future situation of Scarborough's strip malls. Michael von Hausen, a community planner wrote to the National Post in an email saying, "The trick now is to figure out how Canada can destroy its strip malls while saving their cultural 'genetics.'"[100] To preserve the essential 'juice' created by these strip malls has a place in future planning of Canadian cities. The cultural genetics is multifarious—their evolution from being merely a fast convenience to conditions of a slower life of social and ethnically diverse possibilities. Somehow this can be continued into the future of Scarborough's communities. Some of these include working with private developments and learning from a Canadian competition called Strip Appeal. Reflecting on the impact of this thesis can also be used to understand the possible outcomes necessary to continue a better quality of life for Scarborough's communities in the realms of social, economic and environment capacities.

Private Development and Section 37

Density is a need for Toronto. While they significantly occur in the downtown core, inner city Scarborough sees the pattern of demolishing strip malls on avenues and major roads to find space. While these private developments are for profit—necessary in a neoliberal economy—they can do better to serve the communities in which these densities are placed into. While there are local stories and often informal ways of life for the community, provided by these strip malls, the new private developments need to address the existing conditions as a necessary layer in its design toolkit—one that serves the community with public spaces for informal interactions and mom-and-pop retail shops with affordable retail spaces.

Section 37 of the Ontario Planning Act allows the City of Toronto to negotiate and mandate community benefits with developers in order to increase a building's height and density against zoning. These spaces are created with the input from city staff, local communities and ward councillor and benefits are provided by the development as in-kind with spaces within the development or cash-in-lieu for the city to manage. Examples of spaces achieved with Section 37 include recreation centres, streetscapes, park improvements amongst others.[101] This means that new developments in the city have the potential to improve public spaces of Scarborough when strip malls are demolished. However, there should be more ways to mandate affordable retail spaces for small retail businesses in existing strip malls when they are demolished. There are no such provisions at this moment.

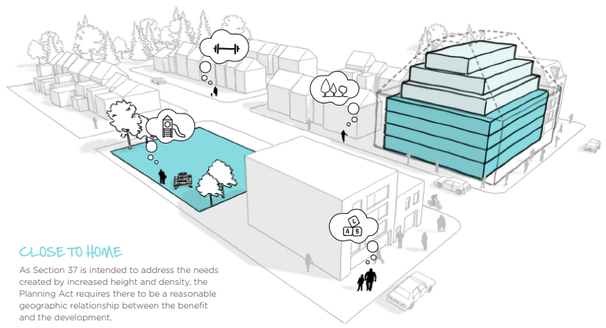


Fig.262: Section 37, diagram

Residents can demand open public spaces in lieu of increased density in a project in their community.



Fig.263: Strip Mall to Be Demolished for Density near Eglinton LRT; 2021; Scarborough, photo



Fig.264: Strip Mall to Be Demolished for Scarborough Subway Extension Station; 2021; Scarborough, photo

These images show that low density architecture, irrespective of their vitality are the first ones to go.

Huntingdale Towns at 3079 Pharmacy Avenue

Five blocks of four-storey townhouses are proposed for this L-shaped strip mall in the corner of Pharmacy Avenue and Huntingdale Boulevard in Scarborough. The proposal consists of 85 residential townhouses consecutively attached and organized parallelly into three rows with surface and underground parking. The townhouses are four stories tall with no multi use component. Having no retail component to replace the existing strip mall function will increase the monotony and punish the community with the lack of a utilitarian destination and a third place. From an article in UrbanToronto, a website covering Toronto developments, entitled Scarborough Strip Mall Earmarked for Townhouse Development, has the public commenting to the proposal—the general consensus is that the proposal is bad for the community. Someone with the username Neighbors commented, “I think it is a bad idea. Community depend on this strip mall almost for half century, It Is a complete strip mall [with] all the needs of people in that community.” Comments from another user named Bojaxs include, “Seems like a poor idea not to replace the retail. Don’t want to encourage nearby residents to have to get in their car to just go grab a scratch ticket or a litre of milk.”[102] These comments suggest that the proposal negates the importance of the existing strip mall at a community level with no replacing alternative.

The resistance to the proposal of the strip mall which contain utilitarian shops like an ethnic grocery shop, dry cleaners and on, needs to be included, perhaps, on the ground floors of the townhouse. While there is a larger mall a block away, demolition of this strip mall compounds the distance for many residents, thus requiring the use of a car and removing pedestrian activities. There is a chance the city does not approve the proposal without any public amenities for the community as noted in Section 37 and it would be wise to include affordable retail spaces for the existing mom-and-pop businesses.

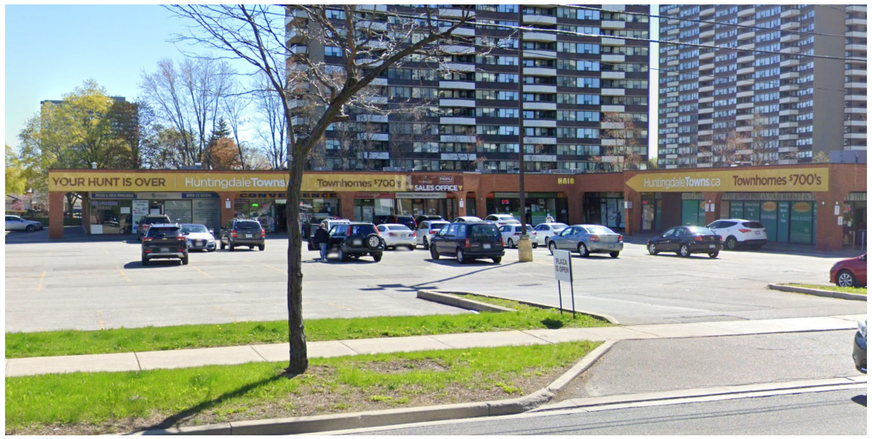


Fig.265: Existing Strip Mall at 3079 Pharmacy Avenue; Scarborough, photo



Fig.266: Proposed Huntingdale Towns at 3079 Pharmacy Avenue; Scarborough, render

Proposed townhouses offer no retail at grade, even though it is demolishing the existing strip mall. This will diminish any street life, and most importantly, force the community residents to drive their car over to retail shops which are farther away. Projects like these ruin any civic opportunities with their “formulaic” design.

Golden Mile Development

The Golden mile, located in Scarborough, is only a small strip of the city, but is a story of urban evolutions that has a national significance to development. With indigenous roots to European settlement post War of 1812 for its rich farmland, Golden mile consisted of an ammunition manufacturing factory for WW2 in 1941, which then became the poster child of Canada's post war boom with industrial buildings, Canada's largest shopping centre called Golden Mile Plaza, and residential subdivisions. While industries declined between 1970s and 1980s due to global trade, big box stores and car dealerships lines the arterial Eglinton Avenue East strip on Golden Mile replacing the previous buildings.[103]

Today, it is on its path to redevelopment with the construction of the Eglinton Light Rail Transit and the planning of high density mixed use complete communities—away from the post war automobile oriented, single use zoning and low density suburban sprawl design ideologies that defined Scarborough. The new development is a welcoming proposal. Entitled as Golden Mile Secondary Plan and studied by SvN with the City of Toronto, the new development exists on Eglinton Avenue East between Victoria Park Avenue and Birchmount Road and demolishes all existing buildings in favour of large residential tower on podium and low-rise typology throughout the strip. Phase one of a specific portion of the redevelopment was recently announced in 2021 by Daniels and Choice Properties between Pharmacy Avenue and Victoria Park Avenue at the site of the Golden Mile Shopping Centre. The ground level appears to be a public realm with new parks slotted into the masterplan for outdoor space and podium ground floors appear to be mixed use retail for indoor space.[104] The existing single use retail stores are concentrated unlike the proposal which spreads it out. The new development plan seeks to involve the community and has plans to provide specific benefits geared towards them, seeming to appease Section 37. This Golden Mile Plan with mixed use transit-oriented density development can be a model for demolished strip malls in Scarborough and beyond, as long as the needs for existing communities and affordable retail is part of the equation. Golden Mile became an area for people to live and work post WW2, and it has the potential to return to its glory with this new model development.



Fig.267: Golden Mile—Industrial Boom; 1961, photo



Fig.268: Golden Mile—Today; 2021, photo

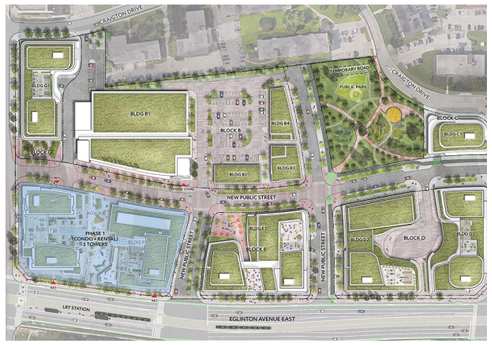


Fig.269: Golden Mile—Redevelopment of Shopping Centre Phase One, drawing



Fig.270: Golden Mile—Redevelopment of Shopping Centre Phase One, render

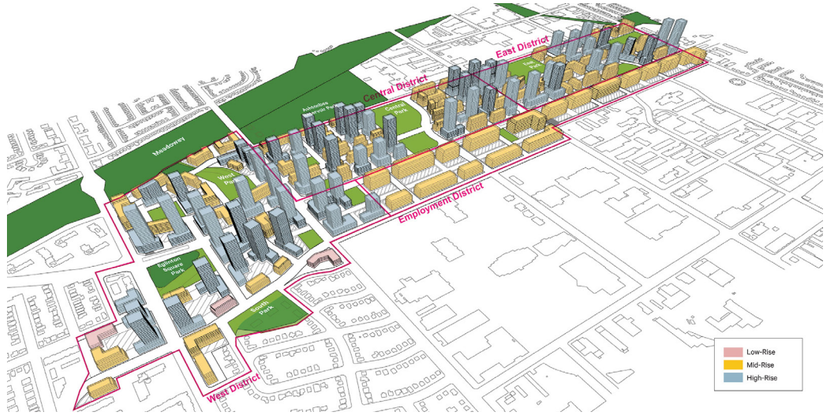


Fig.271: Golden Mile—Redevelopment Secondary Plan; Scarborough, drawing

The retail at grade, due to market conditions, will become large scale shops like LCBO, negating any informal public life by barring small mom-and-pop shops with high rent.

Strip Appeal Competition

Strip Appeal was an international competition initiated by a research unit of University of Alberta called City-Region Studies Centre in Edmonton. This competition questioned the possibility of reinventing derelict strip malls to benefit their local areas. As such, the hypothesis stated by the creators Merle Patchett and Rob Shields was:

> "[T]he reorientation of the suburban strip mall to community use might contribute to community cohesion by enabling "face-to-face" encounters through the creation of a local "marketplace" or neighborhood public sphere whilst also adding to a community's economic resilience through informal networks of social interaction."[105]

This means that the automobile-oriented strip mall can be spatially transformed to create a vibrant condition, even in the suburban context. Therefore, the competition poses the question of 'how' life can be created using the existing abandoned strip mall buildings—not 'if'. There clearly is a fundamental notion that social gathering is the inherent atmosphere needed to achieve a successful reimagination or reinvention of strip malls. While the present situation of strip malls is oriented toward the automobile, competition entries incorporated some sort of an active method of arrival such as cycling. Simultaneously, the inherent benefit provided to local communities exhibited a quality of 'slowness' from the 'fast' quality of convenience offered by the automobile strip malls. Despite the strip mall typology being a simple box with asphalt parking lots surrounding it, their simplicity provided a neutral palette for reimagination of vitality to local communities—always reimagined from their derelict state.

Out of several entries, some are described here to provide a taste of their designs. Free Zoning is the jury winning entry that looks to reimagine a Buffalo, New York strip mall building as a salvageable material quarry to reorganize and reconstruct them as a community housing, without the shackles of zoning regulation—responding to the inherent birth of the strip mall from single use zoning. STRIPscape, a shortlisted entry, transforms an existing strip mall structure into seamless green roofs with viewing roof and habitable glass interior space underneath. The curved sod flooring invites people into the building space. Bumper Crop proposes modules that can be used to cultivate crops for food. These are suspended high above with mass timber columns which create a shaded zone underneath for various activities like markets and playgrounds. Park Aid proposes the conversion of a strip mall site into an automobile storage for the nearby area—to free up spaces from roads and garages in the surrounding neighbourhood—creating the potential for future densification and park creation in those areas. While these entries may appear uncanny, they provide an architectural solution to converting derelict strip mall sites into useful spaces for local communities. Therefore, these could be an answer to the future situation for the strip malls of Scarborough, once they are no longer in use, or perhaps, renovated into for current use. While this competition resonates with the outlook and goal of this thesis—to create a socially vibrant destination for local suburban communities—the difference lie in that Strip Appeal looks to transform dilapidated strip malls while this thesis looks to intensify the pre-existing vibrancy. Strip Appeal provides an alternative way to enhance strip mall sites from risk-averse developers into the hands of community members through renovation rather than demolition.[106]

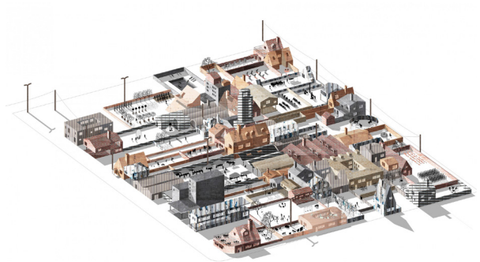


Fig.272: "Free Zoning", image



Fig.273: STRIPscape, image



Fig.274: Bumper Crop, image

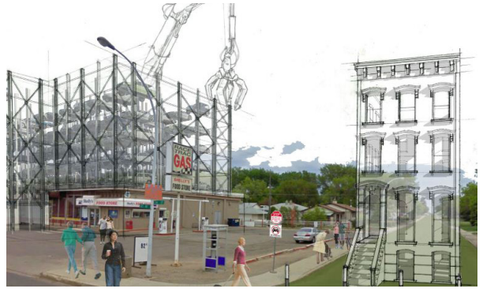


Fig.275: Park Aid, image

International architectural design competition showed optimistic possibilities of public spaces in the sites of derelict strip malls.

Thesis Impact

In a micro scale, the outcomes of this thesis are that it can improve the social possibilities now and has the potential to continue that possibility into the future for Scarborough's communities. In a macro scale, this thesis is a suggestion of an evolution potential of strip malls into community hubs, nationally and internationally. In both scales, these thesis aims to suggest the possibility of social, economic, and environmental benefits that can fundamentally provide an improved quality of life for the local communities surrounding inner city suburban strip malls.

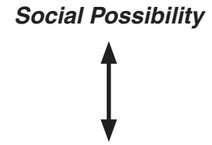
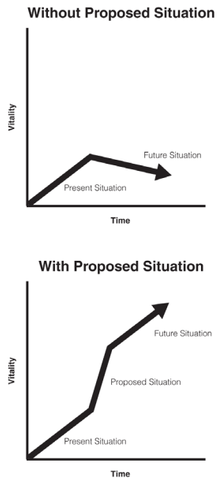


Fig.276: Thesis Impact 1, diagram

Social

Overall, there are seven key impacts identified. First, the COVID-19 pandemic has ensued the need of public spaces for now and the future, so this thesis celebrates this crucial necessity. Second, by realizing the social potential of strip malls for the benefit of communities, this thesis can become a suggestive background to demand future public realms from the developer during inner suburban intensification on strip malls. This is important because Section 37 of the Ontario Planning Act, which is meant to provide community benefits in lieu of height and density increases through the zoning bylaw, can be provided to its full potential in Scarborough. Third, this thesis is an effort to fight marginalization by showing the communities and small local retailers a way to realize their full potential. Fourth, this thesis is a suggestive model for a public and private partnership where the symbiosis yields benefit for both parties. Fifth, this shows a possibility of outcome when the city and communities work together to provide for the suburban common good by using existing infrastructure and without exorbitant financial investment. Sixth, this reimagination of strip malls provides an alternative possibility beyond their visually unattractive character through the materialization of their genius loci which can improve the everyday life of Scarborough's communities.



The vitality of the local informal culture provided by strip malls can be persevered to the future.

Fig.277: Thesis Impact 2, diagram

Economic

The proposal seeks to benefit the strip mall owners and shopkeepers with added economic benefits. Firstly, small independent shops gain more business through increased regular human traffic. With an increase in varied programs, a more vibrant atmosphere invite people to financially participate. Secondly, potential for temporary markets increase revenue for host parties and new businesses from the community. A local economy can be created, which promote resiliency from external factors like flux of resident population. Lastly, minimal financial investment from all parties results in spatial benefit for all. A small financial contribution from the existing business or other involved local members can create a reimagined atmosphere for a more resilient business environment. Despite appearing subversive, the proposed situation of this thesis seeks to improve the quality of life through added economic benefits.

Environment

Besides social and economic, environmental benefits inherently improve the quality of life by providing means of choices. Firstly, intensification of public activities promotes pedestrianization. With more activities near residential areas and local communities, residents can commonly enjoy city spaces actively. Secondly, cycle network aid active and sustainable mobility method for the everyday life. While Scarborough is oriented towards the automobile, life can be allowed to happen through active methods at an eye level. While this promotes more human friendly activities, cycle lanes and crosswalks encourage a healthy and sustainable life choice for bodily and environment benefits. Thirdly, trees bring nature into the urbanized area which reduce heat island effect. While Scarborough's built landscape is primarily asphalt and concrete on the street level, greenery like trees bring the concept of park spaces into the street experience. While trees provide quality of life improvement through microclimate conditions such as shade and visual pleasure, they can also create habitats for animals and control storm water runoffs. Lastly, the utilization of existing strip mall buildings for revitalization and reimagination is inherently efficient, as the buildings' materials embodied energy has been utilized through time.

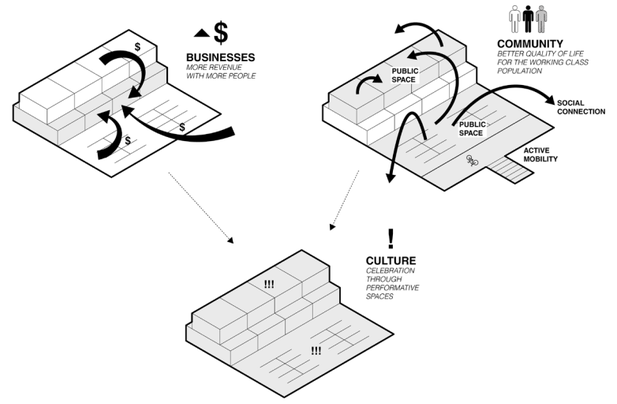


Fig.278: Thesis Impact 3, diagram

With the proposed situation shops can increase revenue with more foot traffic and the community can have an accessible public space for the daily life, creating a symbiotic culture.

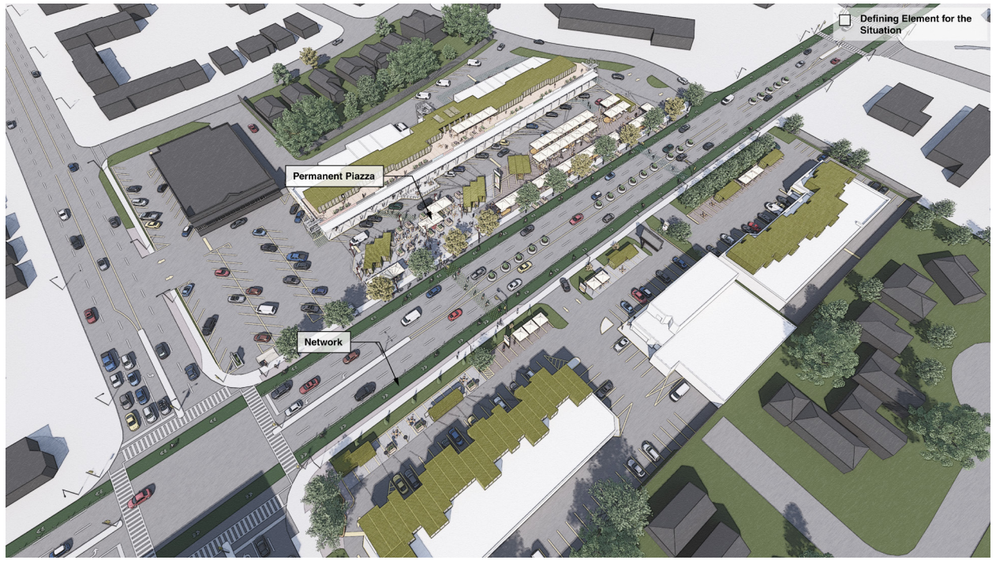


Fig.279: Proposed Situation; render

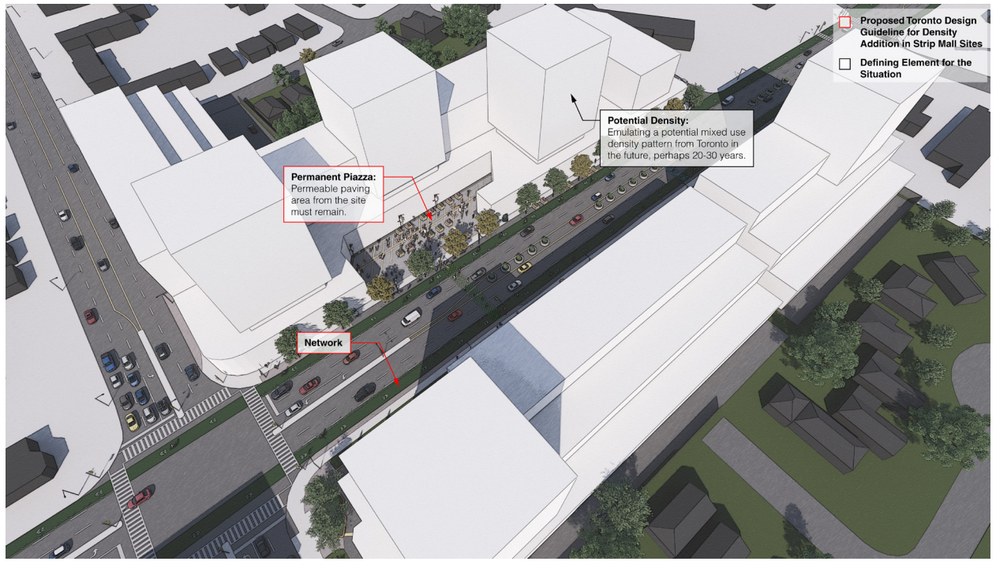


Fig.280: Potential Future Situation; render

Due to the nature of increased future housing needs and speculation, low density buildings like strip malls are the first ones to be demolished to make way for higher density projects—perhaps in 20-30 years. Wexford Heights Plaza and its vicinity of Lawrence Avenue East being a test site, this image imagines that the strip mall will be replaced with condominium or other mixed-use high rise density projects. With that, the permanent paved piazza in the strip malls will remain as a continually existing public space on the arterial roads.



Fig.281: Present Situation; render

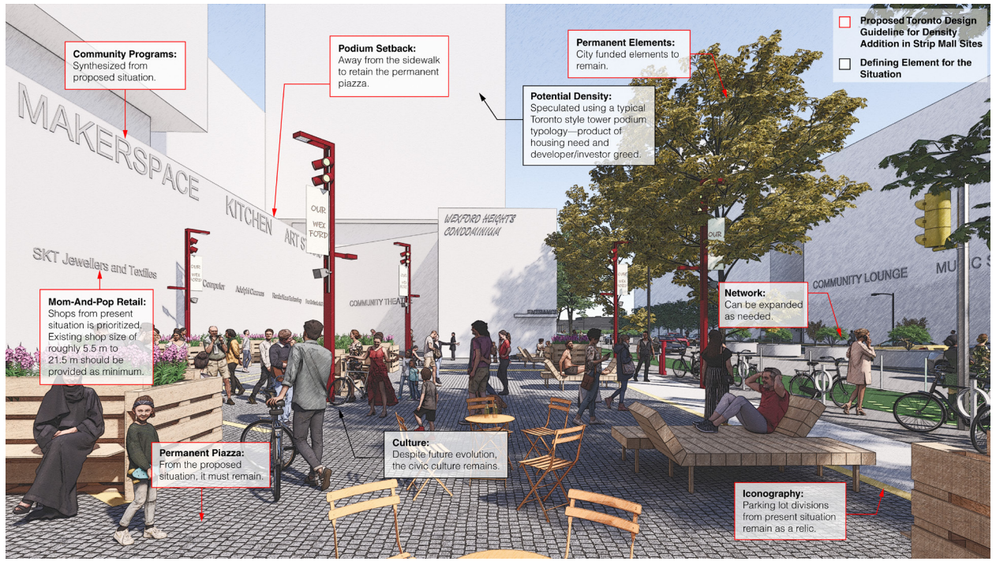


Fig.282: Potential Future Situation; render

Permanent elements like the multifunction light fixtures and seating can remain into the future situation, irrespective to the existence of the strip mall. Since the City of Toronto is weak at designating open public spaces on main roads, the continuation of the permanent paved piazza is a suggested solution. In addition, the rich diversity of mom-and-pop retail shops and the social spaces in the present and proposed situation can be continued into the future private developments by being designated into the podium levels. In that manner, this thesis seeks to celebrate the civic culture of Scarborough's communities ad infinitum.

Conclusion

The thesis design is a way to build culture rather than buildings and to project the provision of public open spaces for the future when Scarborough becomes more urban and mature as an adapted state. This section is an anticipation for the challenges of realizing the public space in proposed and future situations. In order to realize the thesis design in the developments of the future, the following sections reflect upon: ownership systems, parking lot and roof buildability, future transit and development, right of continuity for mom-and-pop shops, and early designation of parkland requirement.

Ownership Systems

The realization of this project requires the identification of the ownership structure of the strip mall sites. The first ownership structure of strip mall properties is a single body or owner who rents out the shops to businesses. This is evident at the test site of Wexford Heights Plaza which is owned by one person, Anthony Kiriakou, who also ran the Wexford Restaurant shop for 63 years at the same strip mall. The second ownership structure occurs when individual shop owners own their shop spaces along with parking space defined by a property line drawn from the boundary walls of their shop space. This structure means that the shop owners collectively own the whole strip mall property with no central management. Typically the pattern is that the larger “plaza” type strip malls with large parking lots are owned by a single owner while the true “strip malls” with small parking lots are owned by multiple shop owners.

The opportunity of proposing this thesis for business owners in Wexford Heights is that it can increase the concentration of people in individual strip mall sites and throughout the strip, which can increase business revenue for the strip mall shops located there. Simultaneously, the temporary markets can be used by shop owners to extend their products or services beyond the interior space of their shop and out to the parking lot and edge of the sidewalk, as another way to increase business revenue. For community residents, the opportunity is an improved accessible destination where they can enjoy socialization and events, along with the ability to shop at changing neighbourhood markets.

The new organization of the proposed situation is providing enough benefit to the owners as a return on their investment while being physically and organizationally subversive to the more narrow and probably even obsolete existing operational structure of the strip malls. In single owner strip malls, it is easier to create a cohesive organizational structure for the public space, in addition to the potential funding of some elements, as it can retain renters with guaranteed flow of customers. For multi ownerships, they already collectively give up their individual space to make a collective parking area so it is possible to organize a public space that imagines the parking space as a single entity. However, if a small number of owner oppose, the remaining spaces can be used for the public space in the present situation. Another solution to implement the balanced need for public spaces is an ephemeral condition where participating shop owners and service providers negotiates with parking, depending on the time and need, like streets in many European cities. This ephemerality can also be an effective tactic for when the open spaces remain in any future situation. For multi owner strip malls, a mechanism to manage the public space could either be by the BIA or distribution of responsibility across the owners based on months of the year. As a third option, a volunteered or funded “public space management body” can be started by the BIA and they are in charge of maintaining the public spaces in the area. Generally, although the return on the investment on the public space may not be evident quickly, the invitation of people to stay at a place longer than they need to imply that they will spend more money there and it allows both the owners and shop owners to remain profitable. The last constraint is that, when putting a lot of markets or interventions as shown in the design, it can hide the visibility of the strip mall shops and collective strip mall signages from the roads. As a solution, a bigger and more active street sign could be used for the shops.

Parking Lot and Roof Buildability

Street infrastructure is paid for by ongoing Scarborough city improvements, while the public spaces on the parking lot and roof are paid for by owners, BIAs, the city where part of a more publicly oriented set of programmes, and with licences to new vendors in the new parking lot and roof markets.

Building on the parking lot is viable because its on a ground plane which already acts as a “free for all” space but also has easy accessibility to the road. The incorporation of containers is possible because they can be transported to and from the site as temporary objects, on a truck. The permanent elements like the permeable paving reduce maintenance for the owner, so the proposition reduces maintenance cost in the remaining life span of the strip mall. The placement of elements like lights and seating is “lightweight” in the sense that it can be easily removed, if not needed. The market tents are foldable, so its in a controllable and ephemeral state. The parking lot elements are paid for by the BIA with funding from the new retail licenses, the tax levy, and also from allocated funding from the city, like the “Innovation Fund” or the “Streetscape Improvement Program” which were previously discussed. The BIA can also hire a design consultant for the public space masterplan using the city fund called “Streetscape Master Plan Program”. The owner funding a part of the public space will mean that the shops increase revenue, making them remain at the location, which reduces the risk of not receiving rent in the case of insolvency. In the case of multi-owners, they can directly benefit from the people concentration made possible by the public space.

The viability of building on the rooftop is a question of structural and organization systems. As discussed previously, the lightweight modules on the roof can be held with an independent structural system where the components are underneath the raised floor and reach out to new structure either in existing partition walls or in the plaza and rear areas. Since they are repeated lightweight modules on the scale of modular homes, they can be disassembled and transported to a different site or remain in place for reuse. For the organization system, the second floor programs can be managed jointly by the BIA and city funded social workers since they are community spaces. The roof elements can be funded by both the BIA and city as a destination for the businesses and city needed micro community centres. The second floor interventions are available as a late phase strategy if doable.

Future Transit and Development

The lot of Wexford Heights Plaza is designated as a “Mixed Use Area” in the Toronto Official Plan and a commercial residential (CR) in the City of Toronto Zoning By-law and the allowable maximum height is 20 m or 6 storeys.[107] The by-law requires the minimum frontage required for the lot is 9 metres and the lot coverage to be 33%.[108] However, the by-law also states that Section 45 Planning Act can be used to seek variance for added height and density proposals. 75% of the main building wall need to face the front lot line meaning 25% of the front lot can be used for the open space for a public open space or “piazza”.[109] The current allowable density is fairly low in the site because most of the by-laws are grandfathered in from the previous city of Scarborough but the City of Toronto amends by-laws on a site-by-site and project-by-project basis, so there are no density targets for the specific site of Wexford Heights currently. Lawrence Avenue East is an “Avenue” as per the Official Plan, making it part of the future growth plan of increased density. Typically, in Toronto, gentle density like mid-rises are common in these areas where transit is limited to only buses or sometimes rarely streetcars, like a portion of Kingston Road in Toronto. The Avenues will have an incremental transformation, where the developments are created over many years and with custom by-laws created in consultation with the local community. The growth plan for Avenues will be aided by transit services and active and pedestrian oriented movements, and this is not very different from the thesis proposal for the network. Buildings like low density strip malls are priority development sites for the Avenue growth plan.[110] The major growth areas with large scale transit projects, like Scarborough Centre with the Toronto Transit Commission (TTC) Scarborough Subway Extension, the Official Plan indicates 400 people and jobs per hectare from the current 177 number by 2031.[111] The city has been approving higher density residential projects within 500 m or a 10 minute walk from high order transit, which is unlikely for Wexford Heights anytime soon.[112] Unlike Eglinton LRT which will add large scale new development on the Golden Mile with a density target of 160 people and jobs per hectare, Wexford Heights will remain much like it is, and

hopefully with the augmented public spaces outlined in this thesis, for at least 20-40 years, unless an LRT or subway line is proposed by TTC or Metrolinx on Lawrence Avenue East.[113] The municipality can establish permanent grade separated cycle lanes or dedicated bus lanes with express services to provide uninterpreted transit service to the Wexford site, as a way to bring more people here. This would mean applying a part of the Avenue growth mechanism from the Official Plan before the density occurs. However, these “weak” transit measures rarely become immediate drivers of speculated developments on its path, so Wexford Heights will experience incremental urbanism with mid-rise gentle density.

Right of Continuity for Mom-And-Pop Shops

City of Toronto has not yet figured out how to preserve mom-and-pop shops in the retail landscape of new developments. In new developments retail at grade is a different economic structure, since the developers or property managers seek for the least number of tenants with long leases to reduce risk. This negates the possibility of mom-and-pop shops to exist, and this diminishes any local employment and cultural exchange support on demolished strip malls. To retain mom-and-pop shops for their cultural and social benefits, there should be a right of continuity policy that allows their “right to return” like the programs for residents in Toronto’s Regent Park redevelopment. This right of continuity policy will give first priority to mom-and-pop shops, whether existing or new ones, and incorporating similar retail sizes like a certain square footage for each shop. Most importantly, the right of return policy will require the maintenance of affordable rents or ownership structures, as part of negotiations for future density development projects located in these strip mall sites of Scarborough. The affordable rent mechanism can be partly subsidized by the city, and also the developer, to create vibrant communities in the future situation.

When Wexford eventually becomes denser with high-rises or mid-rises and the strip malls cease to exist, new development need to come into being, such that the existing vitality provided by the mom-and-pop shops and the public spaces are continued into the future. Development models, like right of continuity, for continuing the presence of mom-and-pop shops can be a way to preserve the ad hoc incremental variety of retail life. On a larger, more formal, investment scale, real estate investment trusts (REITs) like SmartCentres, can manage the properties overall as an investment vehicle available for stock markets.

Early Designation of Parkland Requirement

The City of Toronto is weak at designating open public spaces along avenues and other arterial roads. The continuation of the permanent

open space from the proposed situation into the future situation surfaces the possibility of reclassifying the permanent piazza as the parkland requirement, designated today by the city for new future developments. Since Section 37 of the Planning Act will be needed by the developer to add density, there is the opportunity of using its benefit today by designating it as an anticipated future of potential maximum density. The right of way in the Wexford Heights Plaza is roughly 5.5 metres offset from the sidewalk edge to the inside of the parking lot. In lots of less than 1 hectare, the city requires 10% of land as public park, while between 1-5 hectares require 15% of the developed land parcel. Anticipating the future by designating this requirement ahead of time, for the Wexford Heights strip, this would create open public squares along Lawrence Avenue East. As such, the proposed situation could either remain at its location or move around, depending on future development needs, but regardless, always maintaining the same gross area for the open space. In general, the designation of open space breaks the street frontage rule, which is typical of new avenue developments. To designate these public squares today, the city would purchase the specified lot area from the strip mall owners, and then pass down the cost to the developer, when there is one in the next few decades.

This thesis aims to create the possibility for a civic culture in Scarborough's communities through everyday accessible public spaces at strip mall sites. The future realization of the thesis design is anticipated by acknowledging and responding to the spatial and managerial challenges and opportunities in the realms of: ownership systems, parking lot and roof buildability, future transit and development, right of continuity for mom-and-pop shops, and early designation of parkland requirement. Although the designation of public areas in private strip mall properties are financially and managerially subversive, the underlying goal is to socially and financially benefit all the parties involved in the short and long term.

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