



Unlocking Cultural Space

Planning & Development Resources and Strategies

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The Office for Cultural Space

- Part of the City's Economic Development & Culture Division, Cultural Partnerships
- Launched in 2022
- Leads cultural planning and policy initiatives (i.e.: Culture Connects)
- Leads development of innovative programs (i.e.: Cultural Districts)
- Leads capital projects and manages a portfolio of City-owned cultural spaces
- Engages in partnership initiatives (i.e. SPRE for Arts Spaces)
- Manages the Creative Co-location Facilities Property Tax Subclass program
- Provides a one window approach to supporting artists and arts organizations and City divisions and agencies to address the city's cultural infrastructure needs.

Tools to Support Culture Space

- **Community Space Tenancy (CST) program:** the City provides nominal leases of City-owned properties for non-profit use, including arts & culture
- **Community Benefits:** The City uses planning tools provided in Ontario's Planning Act to secure in-kind community benefits, such as cultural spaces
- **Capital Projects:** the City has a portfolio of heritage properties, museums, community centres, and cultural centres to host cultural programming and partners with the non-profit sector to deliver cultural infrastructure projects

Ontario's Planning System



Case Studies

- Each of the following case studies relied on a range of planning tools and other supports.
- A few common themes:
 - Complex redevelopment projects typically require flexible, creative approaches using a wide range of tools. No “one size fits all”.
 - Most had a non-profit organization with a vision advocating, partnering, and pushing the process forward.
- Each case study will describe what the space is, and how it came to be.

CASE STUDY:

Blackhurst Cultural Centre



- 1995: A Different Booklist established in the Mirvish Village
- 2017: ADB displaced due to redevelopment
- 2017-2025: City worked with developer to secure space in the new Mirvish Village, BCC was born
- BCC will provide permanent, affordable, accessible, net zero community cultural space to celebrate the art of Canadians of African and Caribbean ancestry

CASE STUDY:

Blackhurst Cultural Centre

“Old” Section 37 (Density Bonusing)

- \$1M in S. 37 funds helped to fund the development of the BCC
- Section 37 of the Planning Act allowed municipalities to negotiate for community benefits in exchange for additional height and density.
- Toronto used this power to negotiate community benefits across the city, including cultural spaces.
- The outcomes of S37 negotiations could be unpredictable and uneven.

City Contributions

- The sale of the City-owned Honest Ed's Laneway allowed the City to acquire the building and provide a cash contribution.
- BCC has a 49-year nominal net ground lease
- City waived various fees for permits and site plan.
- The City also provided in-kind technical support through an interdivisional working group.

Mitigating Displacement

- Displacement through redevelopment is a critical concern for cultural space.
- Planners have limited tools to require the replacement of cultural space when redevelopment happens.
- Championed by the local City Councillor, community, and developer.

CASE STUDY:

32 Lisgar



- 2012: City secured in-kind space as part of a broader a Section 37 community benefits package
- 2022: ownership transferred to the City, capital work incomplete, initial unsuccessful REOI
- 2022-24: City completes capital work
- 2024-26: meanwhile use
- 2025: City launches 2nd REOI
- 2027: New long-term tenant or group of tenants

CASE STUDY:

32 Lisgar

Zoning By-laws

- Zoning by-laws implement policy with legally enforceable, specific requirements and regulate permitted uses (and conditions on uses), lot requirements, location of buildings, and built form.
- A zoning by-law amendment is sometimes required to change use.
- 32 Lisgar Zoning: charitable institution, non-profit institution, cultural and arts facility, community services and facilities, or other community or social agency acceptable to the City of Toronto

Meanwhile Uses

- 2023/4: City invites expression of interest for meanwhile uses
- 2024: hosts Toronto Biennial of Art
- 2025/26: hosts meanwhile activations by TBA, POV, Inter/Access, Workman Arts, Watah Black Theatre School, and Glad Day Lit

Community Advocacy

- The redevelopment at 32 Lisgar displaced 80 artist live/work units at 48 Abell
- Active 18 organized the community to advocated for non-profit arts and culture space to replace displaced arts spaces in the West Queen West Triangle redevelopment.

CASE STUDY:

It's OK* Studios



- 468 Queen Street West
- 10,000 sq ft, 3 floors
- Acquired by the City in 2021 for future parkland to support affordable housing development at 15 Denison Ave
- City Council authorized a temporary two-year lease to It's OK
- City contribution of \$47,673 in S. 37 funding for improvements
- Municipal Capital Facility designation (tax exemption)
- EDC is working on a permanent relocation site for It's OK

CASE STUDY:

It's OK* Studios

Meanwhile Uses

- Temporary use of space for affordable not-for-profit, arts and culture uses.
- Often become available due to planned redevelopment.
- Typically feature reduced administrative burden or “red tape” for tenants.
- Toronto’s Culture Plan identifies the need to develop a meanwhile space program
- Meanwhile uses benefit the property owner/City, reducing carrying costs of the property and filling an otherwise empty space/storefront.

Nominal Leases

- City charges a nominal rent (i.e. ~\$1/year).
- Fit-up, maintenance and operating costs, and property taxes (if applicable) are tenant responsibility

City-owned spaces for DIY organizations

- The decision to lease to It's OK* came about through the recognition of a space crisis in the DIY music community, combined with the opportunity in the space.
- Many DIY groups/organizations operate out of spaces not designed for public assembly, and lack approvals/permits etc.
- If spaces can remain affordable and flexible and provide the right supports or opportunities these spaces can support DIY groups.

CASE STUDY:

221 Sterling



Image: Turner Fleischer Architects for First Capital

- Residential development - 870 residential units
- Approx. 500 sq. m. community cultural space
- Displaces the existing Sterling Studio Lofts (a variety of artist lofts and workshops).
- Applicant was required to provide 58 replacement rental units.
- At least 18 were required to be designated live-work replacement rental units.

CASE STUDY:

221 Sterling

Community Benefits Charge

- The previous Section 37 was replaced with the CBC in 2022.
- Compared to the previous Section 37, there is now a maximum limit to the value of the contribution.
- In practice this has limited the ability to secure space. Many developments will just pay a charge to the City.
- The CBC can be collected as a cash payment or as an in-kind contribution.

Ontario Land Tribunal (LPAT, OMB)

- Independent tribunal responsible for resolving appeals and applications on municipal and land use planning matters.
- Many municipal planning decisions are made through the OLT as a result of an appeal of a Council's decision (or lack of decision).
- An appeal can also be resolved through an "Offer to settle", which may include matters such as community space.

Rental Replacement

- Under the City of Toronto Act, the City may prohibit and regulate the demolition of residential rental.
- Toronto has a rental replacement policy, and this has been applied to live-work units.

CASE STUDY:

Downsview



- Secondary Plan adopted in 2024
- 5.4 square kilometres of land, with a mix of private and public property
- 30 year build-out
- 115,000 new residents
- 52,000 workers
- Strong focus on climate resilience, environmental sustainability, and equitable outcomes for Indigenous, Black and equity-deserving groups
- Support for arts and culture space embedded in policy, including minimum space requirements.

CASE STUDY:

Downsview

“Meanwhile” Zoning By-law

- Downsview features a “Meanwhile Zoning By-law” allowing temporary/interim uses on vacant land over the 30+ years it will take to develop.
- Meanwhile uses are typically provided through temporary or semi-permanent structures.
- The intent is to provide “community amenity and placemaking opportunities” in the interim: generally non-residential land uses, including arts and culture, entertainment, and economic development activities.

Official Plans

- Official Plans are municipalities’ key planning tool, guiding long-term growth through policy.
- OPs must conform with relevant provincial plans and be consistent with the Provincial Planning Statement.
- Secondary Plans are more detailed local development policies for a defined area of the City.
- Include general or area-specific policies related to land use, including for arts and culture.
- Include policies related to community space.
- Official Plans may be amended – this can be initiated by the municipality or by a private applicant/landowner.

More information

General

- [Culture Connects: An Action Plan for Culture in Toronto](#)
- [City of Toronto Official Plan](#)
- [City of Toronto Zoning Bylaw](#)
- [Community Benefits Charge: In-Kind Guidelines](#)
- [City of Toronto: Community Space Tenancy](#)
- [Ontario Professional Planners Institute: Planning Legislative Framework in Ontario](#)
- [Ontario Land Tribunal: Citizen's guide to land use planning](#)

Blackhurst Cultural Centre

- [City Staff Report to Council on long-term lease](#)

It's OK*

- [City-owned Spaces for DIY \(Do-It-Yourself\) Music Organizations](#)

221 Sterling

- [Staff Report to Council - Zoning By-law Amendment and Draft Plan of Subdivision Applications](#)
- [A guide to Toronto's Demolition and Replacement of Rental Housing Policy](#)

32 Lisgar

- [Request for Expressions of Interest](#)

Downsview

- [Update Downsview - City of Toronto Website](#)

Thank you

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