

Bridging Divides:
An Examination of the 1998 Parkdale Conflict Resolution Process

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Current Issues Paper, Final Report
Submitted April 2, 2007

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Acknowledgments

I would like to thank my supervisor Alan Walks for his thought-provoking conversations and perceptive comments. I am grateful to course coordinator Philippa Campsie for her generous excavation of important documents and her invaluable advice.

I would like to express my gratitude to all the people I interviewed for this study who gave so generously of their time to help reconstruct this history. I would especially like to thank my outside advisor, Maureen Fair, for her guidance and supply of copious archival material, and John Schaffter for his invaluable insight and enthusiasm. The re-telling of this history is indebted to the people who were there to create it.

Executive Summary

Parkdale is an economically diverse neighbourhood. Since the 1970s the City has attempted to control and defuse an ongoing disagreement among stakeholders about the existence of bachelorettes and rooming houses in the community. This disagreement reached a boiling point in 1998 during a public meeting that widened the divisions among community members, uniting them only in their anger towards the City for failing to implement effective solutions to the issue of rooming houses and bachelorettes. A number of months later the feuding parties were sitting down together and engaged in constructive discussion. They were brought together through a mediated conflict resolution process, an atypical approach to solving community disputes.

This current issues paper examines the origins, process, outcomes, and lessons of this 1998 conflict resolution process. The twelve month intensive negotiations constituted a turning point in a community that, until then, had appeared to be insolubly divided. Yet there is virtually nothing written about this history, a potential loss not only for the continuing problems in Parkdale, but also for community conflict in other neighbourhoods.

This history was re-constructed through twelve open-ended interviews with participants of the 1998 conflict resolution process, and the programs that evolved out of it, as well as the archived minutes of the negotiations.

The resolution process resulted in the introduction of a new approach to regularizing previously illegal buildings, agreed upon through a painstaking process of consensus. The process was imperfect, under-resourced, and never fully implemented. In spite of this, twelve months of mediated negotiation transformed a community that had been locked in a destructive spiral of stereotyping, rhetoric, and distrust into one that acknowledged each other's perspectives and entitlements and laid the groundwork for mutually beneficial solutions.

Bridging Divides

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Introducing the Parkdale Resolution Process

On October 7, 1998, Urban Planning and Development Services held a public meeting to discuss a proposal intended to resolve the long-standing issue of Parkdale's illegal bachelorettes. The City was proposing an entirely new zoning system, restricting all new multi-unit residential buildings in hopes of "rebalancing" the neighbourhood in favour of families. This controversial proposal exposed two decades of tension, anger, and mistrust between the neighbourhood's numerous stakeholder groups. The meeting degenerated into an explosive battle between anti-poverty activists and homeowners, all fearful of losing the community that they saw as their own. Productive discussion became unfeasible as the meeting turned into a battleground of shouting, cursing, and potential violence and was quickly shut down.

One year later, a new proposal was on the table. Most remarkably, this proposal was presented by a previously unimaginable alliance of Parkdale stakeholders, including tenants, landlords, homeowners, businesses, and social service associations. The recommended strategy was the product of a year-long conflict resolution process that, by consensus, came up with workable solutions to a problem that was decades old.

The 1998 conflict resolution process was a turning point in Parkdale's long history of conflict and discord. Yet the only record of this history is scattered among City Council documents, a handful of newspaper articles, and a brief mention in one academic article¹. This history deserves to be explicated; its lessons may well be useful for neighbourhood planning and conflict resolution not only in Parkdale but also across the City.

This current issues paper explores the origins, process, outcomes, and lessons of the 1998 conflict resolution process, uncovered through twelve open-ended interviews and the examination of City Council documents, newspaper articles, planning reports, and archived minutes from the resolution process.

¹ Carolyn Whitzman and Tom Slater, "Village Ghetto Land: Myth, Social Conditions, and Housing Policy in Parkdale, Toronto, 1879-2000," *Urban Affairs Review* 41.5 (2006: 673-696).

Context: Rooming Houses and the Neighbourhood of Parkdale

Rooming houses are a form of housing that can be found in many neighbourhoods across the former City of Toronto (see Map 1). They are an essential piece of the affordable housing stock, providing some of the least expensive and most accessible form of rental housing in Toronto.² Many of these buildings rent on a per-week basis and do not require first or last month's rent, two attractive features for individuals with low-incomes. Additionally, some rooming houses provide tenants with supports such as meals, counseling, medical care and informal networks among peers.

A bachelorette includes bathroom and/or kitchen facilities within the unit, making it a self-contained unit; a rooming house is a room with access to shared kitchen and bathroom facilities. However, since 2000³, there has been no legal distinction between rooming houses and bachelorettes, as the definition of a rooming house is a rental building that contains dwelling rooms and one or more dwelling units that are intended for more than three persons.⁴

Rooming House Distribution in the City of Toronto

Although rooming houses can be found in many neighbourhoods in the former City of Toronto, they are not a permitted use in 66% of the amalgamated City.⁵ These restrictions have led to a concentration of rooming houses in certain areas of the former City of Toronto. Of the 493 properties that are legal or have applied for legal status, 63% are located within three neighbourhoods of the City (see Map 1). Of these three areas, both Parkdale and the neighbourhoods East of Yonge Street including, St. Jamestown, Regent Park, and Moss Park, are areas with a high concentration of rooming houses. This concentration is due to urban renewal and block-busting practices⁶ as well as high numbers of marginalized and low-income residents.

² Social Housing Strategists in association with Richard Drdla Associates Inc., "City of Toronto: Rooming House Issues and Future Options: Final Report," Toronto: April 2004: 19.

³ City of Toronto, bylaw no. 698-2000.

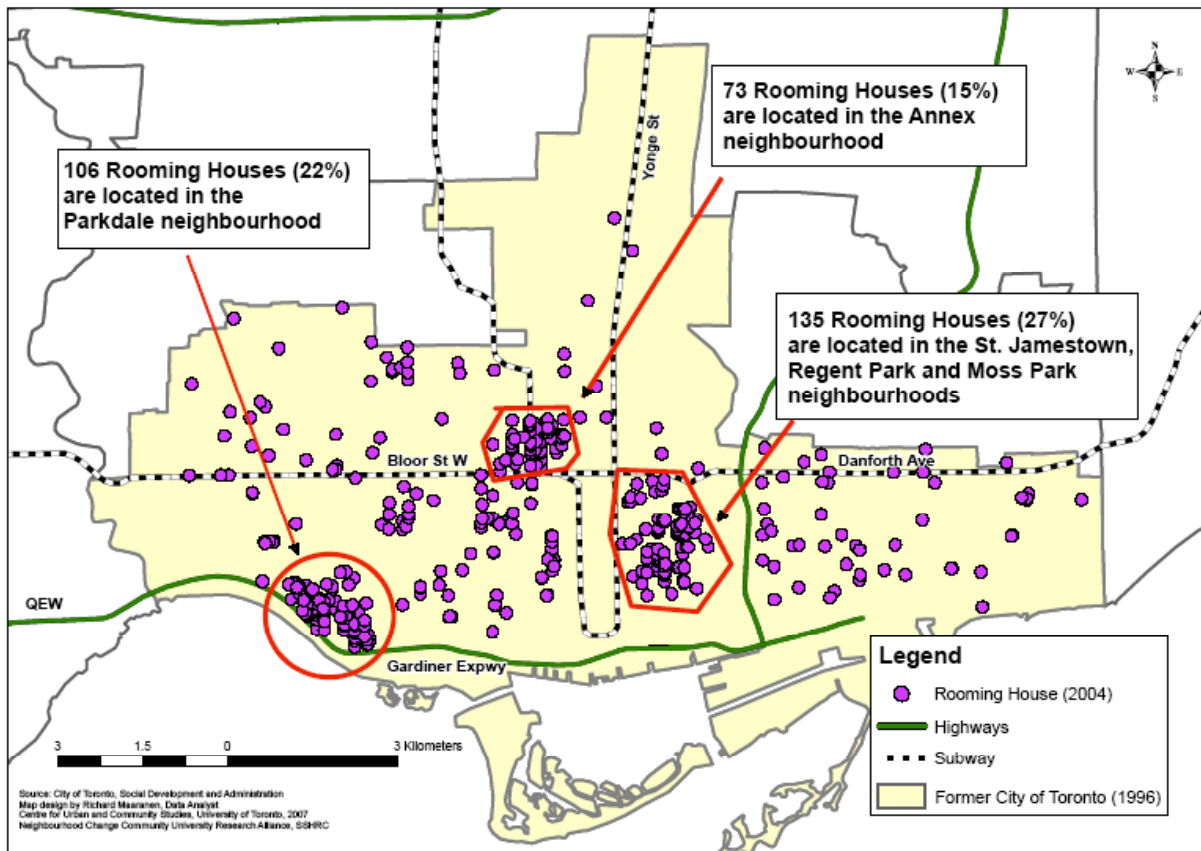
⁴ Given this legal definition, and for sake of simplicity, the term rooming house will be used to mean both rooming houses and bachelorettes. Where this generalization is not appropriate, a distinction will be made.

⁵ Social Housing Strategists in association with Richard Drdla Associates Inc., "City of Toronto: Rooming House Issues and Future Options: Final Report," Toronto: April 2004, 16.

⁶ Blockbusting describes a process of land assembly and neighbourhood redevelopment that was common in Toronto in the 1970s. Investors would buy properties, create interim low-cost uses (such as rooming houses), and then sell to developers when the market was right.

The Annex has the third highest concentration of rooming houses in the former City of Toronto, due to its proximity to the University of Toronto and the resulting demand for student housing.⁷

Map 1: Rooming Houses in the former City of Toronto, 2004



Source: Richard Maaraen, Centre for Urban and Community Studies, University of Toronto 2007.

Parkdale’s Rooming Houses

The uneven distribution of rooming houses is evident in the neighbourhood of Parkdale. The majority of Parkdale’s rooming houses are located in the South Parkdale area, bounded by Dufferin Street to the east, Roncesvalles Avenue and the Gardiner Expressway to the west and the south, and Queen Street to the north (see Map 2). The high concentration of rooming houses within these boundaries is due to a housing stock of extremely large houses in South Parkdale and a relatively low real estate market in the neighbourhood that has lasted until only recently.

⁷ City of Toronto, Social Policy Analysis and Research Unit: Community Neighbourhood Services. “Rooming house statistics, 2004”. Available at <http://www.toronto.ca>

Map 2: South Parkdale



Source: Google Maps, available at <http://maps.google.ca/maps>. Accessed March 6, 2007.

Parkdale's History

A common history

Parkdale is often described as a former village by the lake and although not a planned Garden City, South Parkdale comes close to its ideal.⁸ The large Victorian houses south of Queen Street West housed wealthy families who are said to have spent their weekends relaxing on the beaches of Sunnyside Amusement Park and Bathing Pavilion. South Parkdale was conveniently located within a streetcar ride to the downtown, but far enough away to offer relief from big city life.

The conventional narrative asserts that this utopian village was destroyed by Metro Toronto City Policies—most significantly by the completion of the Gardiner Expressway in 1964, cutting Parkdale off from the lake and bulldozing entire residential communities.⁹ The affluent families are said to have headed to other more stable single-family neighbourhoods, precipitating Parkdale's decline. The large mansions that this affluent population had inhabited were sold and demolished by developers to make room for high-rise apartments or “were abandoned by owner

⁸ See Slater 2004, Laycock and Myrvold 1991.

⁹ Whitzman and Slater, “Village Ghetto Land,” 692.

occupiers and sold to absentee landlords or investment firms who divided them into smaller apartments, and some properties remained vacant as the neighbourhood went into decline.”¹⁰

As the affluent families moved out, a different kind of resident moved in. During the 1970s and 1980s the Provincial Government became committed to a policy of deinstitutionalization. The systematic shutdown of psychiatric facilities in and around the neighbourhood of Parkdale, such as the 1979 closure of the Lakeshore Provincial Psychiatric, discharged thousands of patients into the neighbourhood of Parkdale.¹¹

Although the closure of psychiatric institutions was premised on the benefits of community-based care (which would encourage integration into the larger community), these community initiatives never materialized. Instead, “deinstitutionalization in Ontario was ‘a policy adopted with great enthusiasm’, even though it was never properly articulated, systemically implemented, nor completely thought through.”¹²

The consequence of this radical but imperfect implementation of deinstitutionalization was the release of high needs individuals into communities lacking appropriate social services and facilities. Many former patients remained within the neighbourhood they were discharged into, some simply due to a lack of money to leave the neighbourhood, and others wanted to be close to outpatient services available at local institutions. The “ghettoization” of Parkdale as a haven for former psychiatric patients or, consumer survivors, was accompanied by the growth of an informal network of community support.

The changes wrought by deinstitutionalization added to the ongoing devaluation of South Parkdale’s large houses, due to earlier years of urban renewal and disinvestment. All these factors resulted in the growth of low-income residents and created the perspective from which rooming houses, and similar forms of lodging—flop houses, boarding houses, and bachelorettes—can be seen as a “takeover” or “makeover” of Parkdale’s heyday as a neighbourhood of affluent single-family housing.

¹⁰ Tom Slater, “Municipally managed gentrification in South Parkdale Toronto,” Canadian Geographer 48.3 (2006) 309.

¹¹ Whitzman and Slater, “Village Ghetto Land,” 685.

¹² Dear and Wolch 1987, quoted in Slater, “Municipally managed gentrification in South Parkdale Toronto,” 309.

A different history

Slater and Whitzman have challenged the conventional version of Parkdale's history, arguing that Parkdale has always been a neighbourhood with higher proportions of low-income and single individuals than the rest of the City. Based on a study of Parkdale's tax assessment rolls, street directories, fire insurance atlases, censuses, land registry records, and newspaper articles, they conclude that by the 1930s rooming houses and small apartments were occupying the majority of Parkdale's large houses.¹³

Although Slater and Whitzman do not dispute the influence of urban renewal and deinstitutionalization, they claim that the historical narrative of Parkdale as a "stable, affluent suburb by the lake"¹⁴ has acted as a justification for planning policies that seek to re-orient Parkdale's population back to a "healthy balance" found in the lakeside village. Slater and Whitzman argue that this historical narrative positions the middle-class, single-family, resident as natural and belonging, and the low-income rooming house tenant as a temporary and misplaced aberration to the norm. They assert that the late 20th Century "moral panic" over rooming houses, bachelorettes, and a concentration of social services, was an echo of a sense of entitlement that had been manifested during Parkdale's supposed golden age and therefore was an enduring approach to justifying particular exclusionary policies reliant on a concept of historical belonging.

Parkdale's History of Legislation and Regulation

The early days: 1974-1993

An examination of Parkdale's legislative history of rooming houses and bachelorettes over the last thirty years offers some clarity about the "problem" of these housing types and the problematic results of the City's attempted regulation.

Toronto City Council passed the first bylaws regulating rooming houses in November 1974. The bylaws were passed following a series of rooming house fires in the winter of 1973-74 that claimed the lives of more than twenty tenants. Bylaw 412-74 stipulated that non-owner-occupied rooming houses with more than five tenants must obtain a license and pass yearly inspections. The second bylaw, 413-74, outlined the fire and maintenance standards that rooming houses

¹³ Whitzman and Slater, "Village Ghetto Land," 681.

¹⁴ Whitzman and Slater, "Village Ghetto Land," 677.

must comply with.¹⁵ These bylaws not only created a legal standard for rooming houses but also led to a dramatic decline in the number of rooming houses in operation. Nearly half of Toronto's rooming houses went out of business within three years of the bylaws, bringing Toronto's rooming house stock from 1202 to 582.¹⁶

As explained in Philippa Campsie's 1995 study of rooming houses, for numerous reasons owners chose to close their buildings rather than be regulated.

In order to avoid the expense of structural alterations to provide secondary exits and fire doors, many owners of rooming houses had sold out to developers, decreased the number of tenants to fewer than five, or rented their properties to single families. A few made the improvements, but paid for them by upgrading the entire building to create luxury units with higher rent.¹⁷

Despite the decreasing number of rooming houses, in 1978 City Council passed bylaw 67-78, forbidding any new boarding or lodging houses in the South Parkdale area. This bylaw stipulated that no building could be altered or created if it contained six or more units. The bylaw also stated that all new dwelling units constructed in South Parkdale must average 700 square feet or 65 sq. meters, minimum. Much like the 1974 bylaws, this legislation didn't accomplish its goal of ending all new conversions to small single-occupancy dwellings. Rather, legal conversions to rooming houses ceased and the number of illegal rooming houses or bachelorettes dramatically increased.¹⁸

Former Toronto mayor John Sewell's 1979 Task Force on Bachelorettes became the first of many committees and task forces to look for solutions to the problem of illegal bachelorettes. *The Report of the Mayor's Task Force on Bachelorettes* argues there are two problems with bachelorettes. First, the conversion of rooming and boarding houses to bachelorettes were said to threaten affordable housing, as rooming and boarding houses are said to provide cheaper accommodation. Second, bachelorettes were said to undermine Parkdale's "basic family

¹⁵ Philippa Campsie, "A Brief History of Rooming Houses in Toronto 1972-1994," Prepared for *Rupert Community Residential Services of Toronto*, (Toronto: September 1994) 4.

¹⁶ Murdoch Davis, "Landlords go—and so do cheap rooms," *Toronto Star*, 29 January 1973, page A3. As quoted in Campsie, "A Brief History of Rooming Houses in Toronto 1972-1994," 4.

¹⁷ Campsie, "A Brief History of Rooming Houses in Toronto 1972-1994," 4.

¹⁸ Report of the *Mayor's Task Force on Bachelorettes*, April 27, 1979: 4.

orientation of the low rise neighbourhoods,”¹⁹ as the structural changes required for bachelorette units inhibits easy re-conversion to single family homes.

The subsequent program that developed out of the *1979 Report*, the Bachelorettes Clean-Up Program, aimed to rid the City of illegal bachelorettes by strategic high-profile prosecutions of landlords. The prosecutions successfully closed some buildings; however, they also cost the City hundreds of thousands of dollars in legal fees and never substantially “fixed” the problem of illegal buildings in that bachelorette buildings continued to operate in Parkdale.²⁰

The *1979 Report* saw Parkdale’s problem as being a lack of family housing, but this problem definition soon shifted to being more about the necessity of a “healthy” neighbourhood mix. The 1983 *Neighbourhood’s Committee Report* notes that the City’s planning goal in South Parkdale has been, “to resolve the bachelorette problem in South Parkdale by reconversion of these illegal buildings to contain a ‘balanced’ mix of units, including ‘family-sized’ units...”²¹

Into the 1990s, planning reports continued to identify the problem of Parkdale’s rooming houses and bachelorettes as a matter of balance. For instance, the 1990 *South Parkdale Neighbourhood Plan: Proposal and Update* argues, “It is the primary objective of Council to stabilize and strengthen South Parkdale as a *residential* [emphasis in original] neighbourhood which would provide for the residential and community needs of a population which is diverse in terms of age, income, household and cultural characteristics.”²²

Two main themes emerge from this history: the increasing characterization of Parkdale’s problem as a lack of a “healthy neighbourhood mix”, and the failure of City policies to actually implement any effective responses or solutions.

A growing divide: Parkdale in the early 1990s

The characterization of Parkdale as an unbalanced neighbourhood due to an over-concentration of low-income and marginalized residents was not an analysis shared by all in Parkdale. Instead, this depiction both reflected and stoked a long-standing tension between more affluent

¹⁹ Report of the *Mayor’s Task Force on Bachelorettes*, April 27, 1979: 4.

²⁰ Interview with City staff 2007.

²¹ City of Toronto, *Neighbourhoods Committee Report No. 21: Bachelorette Clean-Up Programme in South Parkdale*, May 19, 1983: 50.

²² *South Parkdale Official Plan: Proposal and Update*, 1990: 2.

homeowners and lower income tenants. Although 93% of South Parkdale's population²³ was, and continues to be, composed of tenants, home-owning residents were able to exert a high level of power and influence. This uneven power divide is characteristic of gentrification and South Parkdale became one of the many inner city Toronto neighbourhoods undergoing processes of gentrification, starting in early 1970s.²⁴

The neighbourhood tension that emerged from this situation is indicative of patterns of gentrification²⁵, or as David Ley defines, "an upward movement in the social status of a census tract".²⁶ The conflict that was occurring in Parkdale during the 1990s characterizes a type of gentrification that, as Tom Slater argues, counters the theory of emancipatory Canadian gentrification, "a process that unites different people in the central city, creating opportunities for social interaction and tolerance"²⁷. Instead, Slater argues that South Parkdale's high level of conflict is characteristic of Robson and Butler's theory of a tectonic social structure, where minimal opportunities for shared social space and interaction create a climate of segregation of polarization. This type of tectonic social structure is linked to some of the most exclusionary affects of gentrification, leading to "the unhappy coincidence of reinvestment and displacement, home improvement and homelessness, renovation and eviction."²⁸

Campsie notes that the large Victorian houses with relatively low property values attracted not only rooming house investors and owners but also gentrifiers. These competing interests led to an explosive "war of publicity and public policy beginning in 1976."²⁹ In the 1980s and 1990s, the growing number and power of homeowners and resident groups in the area fueled this battle. By the 1990s, some of these homeowner groups came together in a coalition called the Parkdale Community Watch, dedicated to "bringing back" the historical village of Parkdale and fighting the "neighbourhood's problems". These problems were defined as drug dealers, sex workers, rooming houses, an over-concentration of social services, and a neighbourhood with unruly

²³ City of Toronto, Social Policy Analysis and Research Unit: Community Neighbourhood Services. Available at <http://www.toronto.ca>

²⁴ Martine August, "Maintaining the cappuccino-free zone: Factors preventing gentrification in two Toronto neighbourhoods," Centre for Urban and Community Studies, Community University Research Alliance on Neighbourhood Change, November 6, 2006: 6.

²⁵ Slater, "Municipally Managed Gentrification," 305.

²⁶ David Ley, "Gentrification in Canadian inner cities: Patterns, analysis, impacts and policy." Vancouver, British Columbia: University of British Columbia, 1985.

²⁷ Slater, "Municipally Managed Gentrification," 305.

²⁸ Slater, "Municipally Managed Gentrification," 322.

²⁹ Campsie, "A Brief History of Rooming Houses in Toronto 1972-1994," 9.

streets.³⁰ Parkdale Community Watch staged public actions, driving the johns and “filth” out of the neighbourhood.³¹

The increased organization and political strength of homeowner’s groups such as Parkdale Community Watch and South Parkdale Ratepayers Association had a pervasive influence on policy development in the mid 1990s.³² This influence perhaps accounts for the growing severity of legislative reforms that the City began to institute in the late 1990s, despite prior evidence of the ineffectual nature of such an approach. The tension and battles that had been brewing for more than twenty years between these various groups was soon escalating into a full-scale confrontation.

In 1993, the growing conflict between homeowner groups and their target of drug dealers and sex workers in Parkdale was examined in the film, *Zero Tolerance: A documentary about a neighbourhood in conflict*. The documentary provides insight into the atmosphere and attitudes prevalent in the early 1990s in Parkdale. It was during this time that the Guardian Angels³³ were active in the neighbourhood, and the ratepayers/homeowners associations started to organize public stand-ins on street corners known for drug dealing and sex work in order to deter crime and drive out suspicious-looking persons.

Both sides are interviewed in this film: the organized homeowners and the local police division; and the drug users, sex workers, and social service workers in the neighbourhood. The film highlights the growing divide between Parkdale’s various stakeholder groups. Although the primary issues in the film are drug dealers and sex workers, the underlying arguments and complaints are virtually identical to those that arose over rooming house conflict. The homeowners argue, “we’ve got so many social services in this community, that’s why it’s disintegrating.” The “transfusion of healthy people” is the solution that was then proposed.

Others in the film argue that “prostitution and drugs aren’t the problem, it’s the poverty, high unemployment and lack of jobs for young people.” The social service organization featured in

³⁰ Information gathered from multiple interviews with representatives from community agencies, and advocacy groups, January-February 2007.

³¹ *Zero Tolerance: a documentary about a neighbourhood in conflict*. Lynx Images Releasing: Dir. Geoff Bowie, Prod. Janice Dawe, 1993.

³² Information gathered from multiple interviews with representatives from community agencies, and advocacy groups, January-February 2007.

³³ The Guardian Angels are a controversial volunteer organization, with chapters primarily in the United States that has uniformed members patrolling city streets to deter crime and violence.

the film, the Parkdale Activity Recreation Centre, asserts that Parkdale is actually a relatively quiet and violence-free neighbourhood because of the social services that provide support to some of the most marginalized people in Toronto.

The anger, tension and contempt between these two sides in the film are palpable and (much like what would occur five years later regarding bachelorettes) this hostility erupted at a public meeting concerning the siting of a new methadone clinic in Parkdale. The fissures that were revealed in this film only continue to deepen and widen through the mid 1990s as the issue of Parkdale's illegal bachelorettes and rooming houses emerge as the primary issue.³⁴

A neighbourhood in trouble: 1996-1998

On December 13, 1996, Toronto City Council passed an interim control by-law, prohibiting all residential development other than detached or semi-detached residences in South Parkdale. John Schaffter, the mediator for the 1998 conflict resolution process, noted "An interim control by-law is as heavy-handed as you can get..."³⁵ and this by-law was indeed met by anger and frustration within the community. The growing fear of losing affordable housing stock and of the de-housing of current rooming house and bachelorette tenants in Parkdale led to new alliances and a renewed commitment to fight further restrictions.

Following on the heels of the 1996 interim control bylaw was the *1997 Ward 2 Revitalization: Draft for Discussion* by the City of Toronto's Urban Development Services. The most significant aspect of the draft plan was the introduction of a completely new zoning system for the entire neighbourhood of Parkdale. This new zoning stated that all previous regulatory attempts had been largely ineffective and therefore a more comprehensive zoning system was necessary. The proposed zoning was to apply to all residential streets except two streets already dominated by high-rise apartment buildings, and "limit the number of dwelling units or rooms to two per lot... Existing apartment building would continue to be permitted as legal uses.... However, the proposed zoning by-law would not permit new apartment buildings as of the date of the passing of the by-law."³⁶

³⁴ Information gathered from multiple interviews with representatives from community agencies, and advocacy groups, January-February 2007.

³⁵ Interview with John Schaffter, January 17, 2007.

³⁶ City of Toronto Urban Development Services, *Ward 2 Revitalization Proposal: Draft for Discussion*, July 1997: 26.

The planning rationale for limiting the number of units to two per lot is that “at least one, and probably both the units will be large enough for family occupancy. The second rental unit, if provided as a rental unit, could assist a young family in carrying the mortgage on their home.”³⁷ This explicit privileging of a certain household composition, and the implicit comment on the desirability of higher-income residents, led to vocal opposition to the plan.

The Final Report, *Parkdale Planning Initiatives*, published in September 1998, brought the community conflict to a head. This report was very similar to the 1997 draft report except for a few minor changes, such as the increase of maximum units per property from two to three, and the recommendation of a conflict resolution process. Still, the premise of encouraging neighbourhood diversity and getting families “back to Parkdale” remained constant.

In both the 1997 and 1998 reports, reference is made to the occurrence of an extensive process of public consultation with the affected communities. This claim was not supported with evidence of public meetings or discussions with stakeholders. Additionally, community groups and individuals complained of a lack of access both to the reports as well as to the process by which the recommended policies were identified.³⁸ Community organizations such as Rupert Community Residential Services, the Parkdale Tenants Association and the Common Front, called the 1997 and 1998 reports exceptionally secretive in both design and authorship. The Parkdale Common Front in Defense of Poor Neighbours³⁹ provided an extensive analysis of the 1998 final report, noting the lack of accountability, the absence of secondary sources, or any sources at all, and the prevalence of controversial claims presented as fact without any supporting evidence. Ultimately, these critics question the link between housing form and poverty. The analysis reads:

And what about the claims that “Parkdale has become more and more the refuge of low income, single people...”? [sic] Is this a problem, and if so why, and why does the author think that this can be solved through zoning practices rather than through social programmes? If poverty is a problem, then how can pushing out or keeping out people with low incomes serve the needs of these citizens of our city?⁴⁰

³⁷ *Ward 2 Revitalization Proposal*, 26

³⁸ Robert Keel, “Submission to Rupert Community Residential Services, Inc. in response to the Report on the Parkdale Conflict Mediation Process, 9 November 1999.” 2.

³⁹ This organization comprised Parkdale Community Legal Services, Parkdale Tenants Association, and the Ontario Coalition Against Poverty.

⁴⁰ The Common Front in Defense of Poor Neighbours, “Parkdale Tenants and Rezoning Mediation,” January 15, 1999: 8.

Although much of the content of the 1997 and 1998 reports are largely consistent with the preceding twenty years of planning reports, these plans ignited a controversy distinct from that which had come before. Perhaps what was different and particularly inflammatory about the 1998 final report is that it not only targeted the most problematized tenant, the bachelorette resident, but also the tenants making up 93% of Parkdale's population. Furthermore, these reports failed to address even the most basic issues of affordable housing. In looking to solve South Parkdale's "twenty-year problem", the City ignited a controversy that exposed twenty years of simmering conflict.

There are two developments that came out of the 1997 and 1998 reports. The first is a further crystallization of and a widening chasm between the two basic viewpoints of the essential problem in Parkdale—poverty and an absence of necessary support services or an over-concentration of poor and single tenants. Second, Parkdale experienced a growth of new and unlikely alliances as the proposed re-zoning did not aim for incremental change or "balance" but rather a fundamental purge of the majority of Parkdale's residents—tenants. For the first time, the various tenant stakeholders in Parkdale had a clear common cause. It was in this context of, paradoxically, heightened polarization and strengthened alliances that a public meeting to discuss the proposed 1998 re-zoning was called.

The public meeting that changed it all

The proposed plan was brought to a community forum on October 7, 1998, at the Masaryk-Cowan Community Centre. Dave McKillop, a planner who had recently been transferred to the South District, recounted that, by way of introduction to the meeting, another planning staff casually assured him, "Don't worry, we've got police coming to the public meeting, everything will be fine."⁴¹

Just as the City staff predicted, the public meeting erupted in mayhem. As described by the *Toronto Star*, "...about 120 tenants jammed a public meeting on the issue, shouting down city officials and turning the event into chaos."⁴² Members of the Common Front ousted Councillor Chris Korwin-Kuczynski as the meeting's Chair and replaced him with a member of the Ontario Coalition Against Poverty. The meeting turned into an all-out battle between members of the Common Front and City staff and politicians. An *Eye Magazine* article, "The Parkdale

⁴¹ Interview with Dave McKillop, January 19, 2007.

⁴² Bruce DeMara and Nicholas Keung, "Uneasy alliance forms to fight Parkdale bylaw," *Toronto Star* 16 Nov. 1998: B1, B4.

rebellion”, details the extreme divisions in the community that were apparent in this meeting. Members of the Common Front called the City’s proposal an exercise in “social cleansing”; those in favour of the re-zoning proposal argued it was simply a return to a “healthy mix”.

The divisions among the participants were clear. One rooming house resident was quoted, “There are a bunch of middle-class people buying houses north of Queen Street and pushing us into the cold. People with money are going to buy their way into the neighbourhood. So we’re all going south of Queen now. And the next thing you know, we’ll be in the fucking lake.”⁴³ Homeowner Rhoda Landis counters this perspective, arguing that the proposed bylaw was only a positive development for Parkdale. She notes, “It [the proposed re-zoning] would make it more difficult for pimps and prostitutes to have a room to do their business in.” Landis goes on to argue, “I very, very much object to the preservation of poor neighbourhoods. Preserve poor neighbourhoods? Why? It’s good to attack poverty, but you do not attack poverty by preserving a poor neighbourhood.”⁴⁴

Maureen Fair of St. Christopher House explained, that although some homeowners had legitimate concerns regarding basic operational issues such as waste collection for buildings intended for single-family use and converted into multiple units, these legitimate and more moderate concerns were overshadowed by the views held by the more extreme resident associations. It was the extreme rhetoric of getting the “scum out”⁴⁵ that became touted as the typical view of the more affluent Parkdale homeowner and resident.

The public meeting ended abruptly with no resolutions on the table. It was clear that the tension in Parkdale was not improving and the City sponsored solution was far from a workable compromise. Anti-poverty and housing activist groups had made it clear that they were not going to meekly accept a solution imposed by the City “from above” but were rather prepared to fight for their neighbourhood. This assertion crashed against the equally strong position held by some homeowners and business owners. Communication among different groups had been strained for decades, but this public meeting brought the mounting anger and tension between these groups to a new and untenable level. The meeting brought forward a slew of personal attacks and

⁴³ Tom Lyons, “The Parkdale rebellion: Local politicians called it ‘re-balancing.’ Residents called it ‘social cleansing’—and the fight was on,” *Eye Weekly* 29 Oct. 1998.

⁴⁴ Rhoda Landis as quoted in, DeMara and Keung, “Uneasy alliance forms to fight Parkdale bylaw.”

⁴⁵ Interview with Maureen Fair, November 9, 2006.

accusations that threatened further escalation, and even violence.⁴⁶ There was not one group that was happy with the situation in their neighbourhood. It was this mix of anger and profound frustration that finally led to a resolve that something had to change. On October 14, 1998, Toronto City Council endorsed the conflict resolution process.

Strategic alliances and shifting politics

The 1996 interim control bylaw, the 1997 and 1998 Planning reports, and the October 7, 1998 Public Meeting together led to a clear exposure of and clash between the fundamental differences and interests within the community.

However, a less foreseeable result of the growing conflict was the creation of unlikely strategic alliances among stakeholder groups in Parkdale. John Schaffter, the mediator for the conflict resolution process, described the climate within Parkdale prior to the conflict resolution process, "...it was a hurting stalemate in conflict resolution terms, nobody was happy, not one person there. They were all mad as hell at the City, they just hated the City."⁴⁷ It was this shared anger toward the City that brought some previously conflicting groups together.

One of the primary coalitions that formed during this time was the Common Front. This group was an alliance of the Ontario Coalition Against Poverty (OCAP), Parkdale Association Against Poverty, People Against Coercive Treatment, the Bachelorette Owners Association, Parkdale Community Legal Services, and Parkdale Tenants Association.⁴⁸

This was an unlikely alliance that most significantly partnered anti-poverty and housing advocacy groups with rooming house building owners. Parkdale Community Legal Services was a lead participant in this new coalition. Parkdale Community Legal Services provides free legal advice and representation to low-income residents in Parkdale⁴⁹ and has historically been aligned with more radical anti-poverty and tenants rights groups, such as the Ontario Coalition Against Poverty. In the past, Parkdale Community Legal Services would never have formed a coalition with landlords, or landlords with it.

⁴⁶ Interview with Maureen Fair, February 22, 2007.

⁴⁷ Interview with John Schaffter, January 17, 2007.

⁴⁸ The Common Front was an earlier incarnation of the Parkdale Common Front in Defense of Poor Neighbours. The later organization did not include the Bachelorette Owners Association.

⁴⁹ Parkdale Community Legal Services, Available at: <http://www.parkdalelegal.org>

However, the 1997 and 1998 Planning proposals to re-zone the entire neighbourhood of Parkdale brought a real fear that the existence of rooming houses in Parkdale was threatened.⁵⁰ This shared reality of a potentially devastating loss for rooming house owners, tenants, and the social service agencies that work with tenants, set the stage for this alliance, acknowledged by some as a strategic trade-off. Robert Levitt, a member of the Parkdale Tenants Association, elaborates, “Just because it’s a common front... doesn’t mean we’re in cahoots with the landlords or that we’re going to forget about tenants’ issues. It’s very explicit. We’re a common front on the zoning issue and only the zoning issue.”⁵¹

Another important factor in the possibility of increased community co-operation was the shift within Parkdale’s homeowner’s and ratepayer’s associations by the end of the 1990s. By the time the Parkdale conflict resolution process was initiated, many of the more conservative organizations were no longer functioning and some of the remaining associations had experienced a shift in towards a more progressive membership. Groups such as the Roncesvalles MacDonnell Residents Association articulated analyses of Parkdale’s housing problems that were reliant on structural and political realities rather than individual fault.

An example of this is a memo issued by the Roncesvalles MacDonnell Residents Association (RMRA) prior to the creation of the conflict resolution process. This memo explained the RMRA’s position on the history of Parkdale’s housing woes, articulating the organization’s view on what should be done to remedy these problems. The RMRA argued that the City had been consistently unsuccessful in dealing with the underlying problems of the bachelorette issue. These underlying issues were defined as, “(1) a large unmet demand for cheap small units; (2) a large unmet need for social supports for many although not all low-income singles; (3) the seeming inability of the private sector to provide affordable, decent units for a growing number of low-income people.”⁵²

This articulation of Parkdale’s housing problems is a distinct departure from the “healthy mix” norm of previous decades and deviates from neo-liberal explanations of the problematic nature of low-income housing in that it points to structural rather than individual inadequacies.

⁵⁰ Interview with Maureen Fair, February 22, 2007.

⁵¹ Robert Levitt as quoted in, Bruce DeMara and Nicholas Keung, “Uneasy alliance forms to fight Parkdale bylaw,” Toronto Star 16 Nov. 1998: B1, B4.

⁵² Roncesvalles MacDonnell Residents Association, “RMRA’s position on illegal bachelorettes and rooming houses,” 28 June 1999: 2.

Furthermore, this position is atypical of previous homeowner's associations in Parkdale and characteristic of a larger shift in political leanings of Parkdale's more affluent residents.⁵³

The Theory of Conflict Resolution

Exploring two approaches

For the purposes of this paper, it is important to discuss and differentiate between two different approaches—positional and interest-based bargaining—and the particular methods that align with each approach. The field of conflict resolution theory and practice is extensive and diverse with each particular method having its own ideological underpinnings and objectives.

The practice of positional bargaining is the most common way of resolving conflict. This approach encompasses two primary strategies: “by application of power; by determining who is right...”⁵⁴ The Power model is based on the notion that those who possess the most power have the greatest ability to resolve conflict. In a democratic system, legitimate power is exercised by government bodies but is also influenced through the control of resources by those in positions of high social status.⁵⁵ The rights-based approach is similar yet places greater emphasis on the State through its reliance on two elements: an objective standard of law or policy and a neutral adjudicator.⁵⁶ A resolution is imposed by the adjudicator following these objective standards.

Some of the problems with rights and power based approaches are: they might not achieve the most just solution; the imposition of a resolution by a party outside of the conflict has the potential to further damage the relationship between disagreeing parties; and they exclude innovative solutions that might not be on the table.⁵⁷

The power and rights models both use positional bargaining. This means that each side takes a particular stance and negotiates in a manner that best protects their objectives, making negotiation a battle of strengths and will. Fisher and Ury, of the Harvard Negotiation Project, argue that positional bargaining is inherently flawed.

⁵³ Interview with Paul Denison January 19, 2007 and Maureen February 22, 2007.

⁵⁴ E. Franklin Dukes, Resolving public conflict: Transforming community and governance, (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 1996) 135.

⁵⁵ Dukes, Resolving public conflict, 136.

⁵⁶ Interview with John Schaffter, January 17, 2007.

⁵⁷ Interview with John Schaffter, January 17, 2007.

As more attention is paid to positions, less attention is devoted to meeting the underlying concerns of the parties. Agreement becomes less likely. Any agreement reached may reflect a mechanical splitting of the difference between final positions rather than a solution carefully crafted to meet the legitimate interests of the parties. The result is frequently an agreement less satisfactory to each than it could have been.⁵⁸

The second approach is interest-based bargaining. In this type of negotiation process, the underlying issues causing the conflict—rather than the absolute positions in which each group has been previously entrenched—is the focus of discussions. The goal is to uncover how people have come to these positions and what their main concerns are, thereby building on the “big hope in interest based negotiation: that you can explore the interests sufficiently that you can find more than simply a weak compromise but rather a rich agreement.”⁵⁹

One of the primary methods employed in interest-based negotiation is a transformative approach to mediation. The transformative approach shifts the focus found in the common conflict resolution approaches of finding a solution but largely ignoring the human elements underlying the conflict. Instead, the fundamental concept of a transformative mediation process is that not only must a particular problem be solved, but that equally important is changing the negative patterns of miscommunication, stereotyping, domination and anger that led to the problem in the first place. Bush and Folger elaborate:

With or without the achievement of agreement, the help parties most want, in all types of conflict, involves helping them end the vicious circle of disempowerment, disconnection, and demonization—alienation from both self and other. Because without ending or changing that cycle, the parties cannot move beyond the negative interaction that has entrapped them and cannot escape its crippling effects.⁶⁰

The two primary goals of a mediated transformative negotiation are the achievement of empowerment of all involved parties and the mutual recognition of the humanity and of the positions of all opposing groups. The underlying hope is that a new and sustainable pattern of

⁵⁸ Roger Fisher and William Ury, Getting To Yes: Negotiating Agreement Without Giving In, 2nd edition (New York, NY: Penguin Books, 1991) 5.

⁵⁹ Interview with John Schaffter, January 17 2007.

⁶⁰ Robert A. Baruch Bush and Joseph P. Folger, The Promise of Mediation: The Transformative Approach to Conflict (San Francisco, California: Jossey-Bass, 2005) 52.

interaction will arise, one that will help solve the issue at hand and prevent the rise of future disputes.

It is this model of transformative, interests-based negotiation that was used in the 1998 conflict resolution process. As Mr. Schaffter explained, in the case of Parkdale's bachelorettes there were two opposing perspectives when the mediation began: "those are illegal buildings, they have been illegal for twenty years, they need to be all shut down; and these buildings provide affordable housing for a city in a housing crisis, legalize them no questions asked."⁶¹ It was through the use of a transformative, interest-based negotiation process that the group was able to move away from these absolute positions and instead look for new and mutually beneficial approaches to the problem of Parkdale's rooming houses and bachelorettes.

The Parkdale Conflict Resolution Process

Origins and organization

On October 14, 1998, Toronto City Council endorsed the conflict resolution process, in hopes it would "achieve consensus on the appropriate approach the City should take to the existing bachelorettes and illegal rooming houses in Parkdale, such process to include the appointment of a facilitator who is acceptable to all groups."⁶² Initially, the agenda for this resolution process did not include the proposed re-zoning for South Parkdale that would limit the number of units per lot to three. However, once the basic process was approved, at the request of the local Ward Councillors, the proposed re-zoning was put on the table.

Community Council provided a detailed list of terms and conditions to direct the process, including the appropriate role for City Councillors and participants.⁶³ The report stressed, "solutions to complex community problems are best worked out collaboratively with community associations, agencies and city departments." This report also underlined the important role of City departments and staff in providing information on the limits and legalities of possible options.

⁶¹ Interview with John Schaffter, January 17, 2007.

⁶² Toronto Community Council, "Report No. 12", October 28, 29 and 30, 1998.

⁶³ Toronto Community Council, "Report No. 12", October 28, 29 and 30, 1998.

The appropriate participants for the conflict resolution process were defined by the following two questions.

1. Who has a direct interest in the quality and status of existing bachelorettes and rooming houses in Parkdale?
2. Which groups, associations and agencies have already expressed an interest in the issue because they either live or work in Parkdale?

These two criteria defining participants were necessary in that it legitimated many of the groups that were already involved in the conflict surrounding Parkdale's rooming houses and defined clear and objective criteria for any new groups or individuals who wanted to be involved.

Early meetings and agreeing to a mediator

At the time that City Council passed the resolution for the conflict mediation process, John Schaffter was working in the Corporate Services Department at the City. Mr. Schaffter had previously run the mediation service for the City's Cooperative Housing Program and had taken courses in mediation and negotiation. He had also worked with the City's planning, housing, and fire departments in the field of mediation and was therefore known to the Councillors and staff in these City departments. It was Mr. Schaffter's experience in the field of conflict resolution and his relative distance from the Parkdale conflict that were two of the main reasons he was asked to chair the process.

However, as stipulated by City Council, all parties had to mutually agree to the mediator. In an interview, Mr. Schaffter explained that he knew if he had just walked in and asked to lead the process, the answer would have been a resounding "no" given the level of divisions among the various stakeholders. Furthermore, Mr. Schaffter's status as a City employee concerned many that a mediator on the City's payroll would inevitably represent the interests and biases of City Hall and skew the process in the City's favour.

Knowing all of this, at the beginning Mr. Schaffter only sat in on the meetings, acting as an advisor, providing guidance about the theory and processes of multi-stakeholder conflict resolution. The role of mediator rotated each meeting among the representatives present. For instance, John Colautti, then a member of the Parkdale Village Residents Association, chaired the first meeting of the conflict resolution process, on November 2, 1998.⁶⁴

⁶⁴ Minutes of Conflict Resolution Meeting, November 2, 1998. Accessed through the MF Archives, the personal files of Maureen Fair.

A different mediator led the first number of meetings but it quickly became clear that this approach was not achieving any substantial results. It was too difficult for participants to represent their stakeholder's perspective while also attempting to chair an unbiased and productive meeting. By this point, Mr. Schaffter had also demonstrated his professional and neutral position in the conflict, and was asked by the group as a whole to be the mediator for the entire conflict resolution process.

The first step that John Schaffter took after being appointed mediator, was meeting separately with each stakeholder group in order to understand and record their interests and positions in the mediation process and in regards to Parkdale's bachelorettes. After identifying all of these positions, Mr. Schaffter compiled the results into a document called the *Draft Conflict Resolution Process Regarding Rooming Houses in South Parkdale*.⁶⁵ In addition to outlining the basic positions of each stakeholder group, the *Draft* contained four preliminary ground rules gleaned from opinions that had been expressed by participants in the early meetings as well as in the interviews that Mr. Schaffter completed. The four rules were as follows:

1. Avoid de-housing.
2. Come up with solutions that are clear, legal, and can be implemented.
3. Ensure housing quality, safety and standards.
4. Ensure availability of affordable housing.

Also included in this document was information regarding the role and responsibility of stakeholder groups, City departments, and City Councillors; preliminary general recommendations for solving the conflict (such as clear definitions for rooming houses, clear housing standards, a process reviewing illegal buildings); and a recommended four-step process of negotiation. The content of this document was determined not only by the interviews and positions of those involved in the Parkdale conflict resolution process, but also informed by the theory of transformative interests-based negotiation. This relationship to transformative mediation theory is especially evident in the *Draft's* discussion of four stages of mediation in that it stresses communication, cooperation, and innovation.

The *Draft* was adopted by the group as a whole and became the basic outline for the twelve months of negotiation that followed.

⁶⁵ The *Draft Conflict Resolution Process* of November 1998 will now be referred to simply as the *Draft*.

The mediated negotiation begins

From the beginning, it had been understood that the conflict resolution process would conclude only with decisions reached by consensus. In order to do this with such a disparate group, the *Draft* outlined four stages of the mediation, stating, “If the mediation is to be a success appropriate time must be spent on each stage.”⁶⁶ The four stages comprised the following.

1. Setting the stage, explaining the process, agreeing on how to proceed.
2. Identifying and framing the issues.
3. Exploring the issues and looking for options.
4. Finalizing settlement.

The first stage was accomplished with the guidelines set by the City and the adoption of the *Draft*. The appropriate stakeholders had been determined, the mediation process explained, the roles and responsibilities of the potential stakeholder groups and the City defined, and ground rules for the entire process had been developed. Seven stakeholder groups were involved in the negotiation process. Some comprised multiple groups and others represented only one group. Figure 1 details the breakdown of these groups.

Figure 1: Stakeholder Groups involved in Mediation

Group	Representation	Notes
Business Improvement Assoc.	Parkdale Village Business Improvement Association (BIA)	
Resident Associations	Roncesvalles-MacDonnell and Parkdale Village Residents Associations	
Community Agencies	St. Christopher House, Habitat Services, the Queen Street Mental Health Centre, Parkdale Activity and Recreation Centre, Parkdale Community Legal Services (PCLS)	PCLS was invited but chose not to participate in the process
Bachelorette Owners	Bachelorette Owners Association that represented 17 owners and 27 buildings	
Bachelorette Tenants	Bachelorette Tenants Group	7 unaffiliated tenants involved and 3 active throughout process
Parkdale Tenants	Parkdale Tenants Association	Left the process in January 1999
City	Planning, Municipal Licensing and Standards, Buildings, Legal, Housing, Health, and Fire, local City Councillor David Miller, and Councillor Korwin-Kuczynski	All attended as non-voting members

⁶⁶ John Schaffter, “Draft Conflict Resolution Process Regarding Bachelorettes and Illegal Rooming Houses and Zoning in Parkdale,” November 1998.

As is often the case with multi-stakeholder negotiation, the actual meetings were conducted with two “circles” around the table. Each stakeholder group has two seats at the table, with as many as ten people watching the process, acting as a caucus, or sharing responsibility for participating in the meetings. If the larger group becomes unhappy with the actions or decisions of their representative(s), the group can choose to appoint a new representative(s). This format allows for all groups to be included at each meeting but prevents the chaos that would accompany a larger team of negotiators. Furthermore, this format ensures that power is equitably balanced between both large and small stakeholder groups, preventing the groups with more people from dominating the decision making process.

Identifying and exploring the issues

The second and third stages of mediation—identifying and exploring the issues—was where “the different interest groups have the opportunity (sometimes for the first time) to listen and understand what the other groups’ concerns are and to express what their own concerns are.”⁶⁷ Once this identification of the issues had been accomplished, the task of looking for options started. The method of exploring options was explained to the group:

Each of the issues raised...must be explored from a variety of perspective [sic] before options for dealing with the issues are generated. This phase of the mediation will take time and is best done with a small core group of representatives from the different stakeholder groups.⁶⁸

This was an accurate description of what played out in the Parkdale resolution process. The majority of meeting minutes detail options and debates over particular issues. This was due not only to disagreements and conflict but also to the backlog of problems that had never received proper attention. By the time the conflict resolution process had begun, there were thirty-four issues on the table, all of which needed new directions in policy and action. The primary issues can be summarized in the following nine categories:

- Zoning controls
- Creation of a new Parkdale housing board
- Tax incentives and rates
- Retrofit programs

⁶⁷ Schaffter, “Draft Conflict Resolution Process Regarding Bachelorettes and Illegal Rooming Houses and Zoning in Parkdale.”

⁶⁸ Schaffter, “Draft Conflict Resolution Process Regarding Bachelorettes and Illegal Rooming Houses and Zoning in Parkdale.”

- Licensing and building standards and enforcement
- Appropriate unit sizes and mix
- Standards for pre and post 1978 buildings⁶⁹
- Affordability and tenant protection issues
- Neighbourhood and building aesthetics

Over the course of the negotiations, these thirty-four issues were further broken down into sub-topics and options, some having as many as eight possibilities. It was the brainstorming, discussion, and weighing of these options that formed the substantial work of the conflict resolution process. As a method to sort through the varying positions of each stakeholder group in relation to each topic, John Schaffter designed a survey that permitted each group to state its position on each issue. The survey was distributed to the agencies, the BIA, bachelorette owners, Parkdale Village Residents Association, the RMRA, the Parkdale Tenants Association, and the Bachelorette Tenants Group.

The results of the survey indicated that although there was disagreement between stakeholder groups regarding the most appropriate response or policy for a given issue, there was also considerable overlap. All parties unanimously agreed with the objectives of decreasing parking requirements in order to increase green space, the creation of a centralized registry for all City information on legal and illegal buildings and site visits, and, in principle, the creation of a Parkdale Housing Board made up of members of the community, mirroring the stakeholder groups active in the resolution process. These issues received support from all stakeholder groups as they were designed to make sure that there was “something for everyone” in the proposed programs and policy directions. For instance, in the case of decreasing parking requirements in order to increase green space, the residents and business improvement associations were happy as it would improve neighbourhood aesthetics, the owners were happy because it lowered their expenses, and the residents and tenant associations supported this policy because they saw it as improving the livability of these buildings. Such initiatives are demonstrative of what John Schaffter has called the big hope of interest-based negotiation, identifying “win-win” solutions, thereby keeping all parties at the table and finding a “rich solution rather than a weak compromise.”⁷⁰

⁶⁹ In 1978, all new rooming houses were outlawed in South Parkdale and therefore buildings that were converted after this date had to be evaluated differently than buildings that were once legal. The question of which standards should be used to evaluate pre and post 1978 buildings were the issue to be discussed.

⁷⁰ Interview with John Schaffter, January 17, 2007.

The issues that elicited the highest levels of disagreement and conflict were the proposed policies of lifting all restrictive zoning⁷¹, and licensing all rental housing. Those that supported these policies argued that the regulation and siting of bachelorettes and rooming houses under a different system than regular rental housing was discriminatory. Support for these two issues were indicative of fundamentally different ideological and political positions between groups such as Parkdale Tenants Association and the other stakeholder groups involved in the process. Furthermore some groups may have been supportive of these initiatives, in theory, but believed that the implementation of these policies was implausible.

In addition to the preliminary ideological differences, the ability to talk across these differences was limited when, early on in the mediation, in January of 1999, the Parkdale Tenants Association (PTA) left the process. This decision followed the closure of a rooming house on Elm Grove Avenue that the PTA said left the tenants homeless.⁷² The PTA accused the City of acting in bad faith as there had been an agreement that no buildings would be closed while the mediation was occurring. After leaving the conflict resolution process, the PTA sent a letter to the City and John Schaffter outlining their dissatisfaction, anger, principal objectives, and concerns for the mediation process. John Schaffter recounted that after the PTA left, the remaining group “had a big discussion of whether we would stop the process cold or whether we would continue and we basically said that they were always welcome. They left us with a list of demands and I blew up the sheet of demands and put it on the wall so their demands were always in the room with us and they could stick their nose in at anytime.”⁷³

The enormity of work, complexity of issues, and division among stakeholders pushed what was supposed to be a six month process into a twelve month period of negotiation. The resolution process evolved into a series of 12 evening and 3 all-day meetings where the legalities, advantages, and objections to the various options were discussed, researched, and discussed again. Many participants described the process as “excruciating”⁷⁴ but remained committed to the ideals of the resolution process and the method of reaching decisions solely by consensus.

⁷¹ Removing restrictive zoning means the implementation of open zoning across the City where all uses are permitted everywhere. It is hoped that ending restrictions to uses such as basement apartments, rooming, boarding, and personal care facilities would increase the amount of affordable housing in all neighbourhoods.

⁷² Common Front in Defense of Poor Neighbourhoods, “Parkdale Tenants and Rezoning,” Executive Summary, January 15, 1999. MF Archives.

⁷³ Interview with John Schaffter, January 17, 2007.

⁷⁴ Interviews with numerous participants of the conflict resolution process, January-February 2007.

Conclusion of the process

Two primary recommendations

On October 22, 1999, the progress and recommendations of the conflict resolution process were compiled into a report and presented to Toronto Community Council.

Underlying the recommended strategy was the following statement: “The group as a whole agreed that the essential issue was the creation and maintenance of high-quality housing options, suitable for a wide range of economic and household circumstances. This requires a new process of regulation, inspection and licensing of existing and future units.”⁷⁵ It was noted that the recommendations were reached by consensus and had the approval of both Councillors and City staff.

The recommended strategy included a detailed list of eighteen issues or approaches to Parkdale’s legal and illegal rooming houses and bachelorettes. The two primary recommendations were the creation of a Parkdale Housing Committee and a Pilot Project Group. These two bodies were intended to work together and with other City departments to license and monitor bachelorette buildings that had previously been illegal.

The Parkdale Housing Committee was designed to include representation from “4 tenants of whom 2 are from local tenants groups, 2 owners, 1 BIA representative, 2 social service providers, and 2 representatives from residents associations.”⁷⁶ The goal of this committee was to provide consistent community input on Parkdale’s housing issues to City Council and City departments as well as to monitor the status of Parkdale’s affordable housing stock in order to protect it. The Committee was intended to operate independently of the City.

The Parkdale Housing Committee was the mechanism to provide the City with ongoing input from the community and the Parkdale Pilot Project was the official body that would take these recommendations and implement the appropriate strategy of licensing and monitoring. The Parkdale Pilot Project was to be fully funded by the City of Toronto and include full-time staff with a range of expertise. The team was to be made up of a full time director, a research clerk, a tenant-landlord liaison, a full-time buildings inspector, and a full-time housing standards

⁷⁵ City of Toronto, City Council Legislative Documents, “Parkdale Conflict Resolution Process,” October 22, 1999: 4.

⁷⁶ City of Toronto, City Council Legislative Documents, “Parkdale Conflict Resolution Process,” October 22, 1999: 6.

inspector. It was also stressed that the Parkdale Pilot Project staff should “have priority access”⁷⁷ to City staff in housing, licensing, legal, and fire inspections or departments.

The Parkdale Pilot Project was the mechanism through which the majority of the other eighteen recommendations would be implemented. The recommendations fell under three primary objectives:

1. Licensing bachelorette buildings, pre 1978, post 1978, post 1996, according to the agreed standards
2. Minimizing and dealing with any cases of tenant relocation
3. Ensuring on-going maintenance and standards

The most in-depth recommendations were regarding the different procedures for licensing previously illegal bachelorettes depending on whether they were built before or after the 1978 ban on rooming houses or the 1996 interim control by-law. Units that were built before 1978, and could prove this, would be evaluated according to these historical standards. Buildings that were built after 1978 would be subject to review against new criteria developed by the Parkdale Pilot Project and the Parkdale Housing Committee. Finally, buildings that were converted after the introduction of the 1996 interim control by-law would continue to be considered illegal and would not be dealt with through the Parkdale Pilot Project.

City Council adopted the October 22, 1999, report in full. There was no mention of the draft zoning bylaw limiting the number of units per lot to three.

Evaluating the Conflict Resolution Process

The task of evaluating Parkdale’s conflict resolution process is best accomplished by looking separately at the process and the outcomes of the mediation. This separation is necessary due to the structure and goals of transformative mediation theory, which prioritize process over outcome; it is also helpful in exploring a more nuanced analysis of what happened. My evaluation is based on compiling and representing, as accurately and comprehensively as possible, the experiences and assessment of the resolution process, as recounted by the participants that I interviewed.

⁷⁷ City of Toronto, City Council Legislative Documents, “Parkdale Conflict Resolution Process,” October 22, 1999: 7.

Evaluating the process

The role of individual “champions”

The mediation process was drawn out over twelve months and fifteen lengthy meetings, taking place during evenings and weekends, offering participants no compensation for hundreds of hours of work. But well above the demanding time commitment, most people emphasized the incredible emotional drain of a process that required building new lines of communication and cooperation among previously divided groups. The mediation had been assigned the task of resolving more than twenty years of City oversights and mistakes, ineffective and misdirected planning legislation, and an entrenched climate of rhetoric and stereotypes. More than one person interviewed for this research expressed the sentiment that the process, “almost killed me.”⁷⁸

In interviewing people involved in this process, many remarked how particular individuals had been fundamental to the success achieved. A number of people were identified as exhibiting an exceptional commitment to the process and a great ability to bridge divides. In particular, John Schaffter’s skills, knowledge and commitment to the principles of interest-based negotiation, his ability to manage and diffuse conflict, and his willingness to make personal sacrifices were repeatedly noted as one of the primary reasons for the success of the conflict resolution process.

In an interview, City Planner Dave McKillop noted that one of the perhaps surprising strengths that Mr. Schaffter brought to the process was his lack of expert knowledge of planning and the history of housing conflict in Parkdale. Mr. McKillop recounted, “he [John Schaffter] would just stand up there and say ‘I don’t understand what you are saying, explain it to me’. And then someone would be telling him and therefore everybody and they would all sort of get to hear each other’s perspectives.”⁷⁹ In asking participants to explain themselves so that he could understand, Mr. Schaffter was also ensuring that stakeholder’s were communicating their views and positions to the other participants, challenging pre-conceived notions and stereotypes.

John Schaffter was the sole paid staff of the resolution process and was responsible for organizing the group members, taking minutes, liaising between the City departments and acting as the mediator, in addition to his other work with the City. Many felt that it was the lack of allotted resources that pushed an already challenging mediation process to the brink so that only

⁷⁸ Interviews with numerous participants of the conflict resolution process, January-February 2007.

⁷⁹ Interview with Dave McKillop, January 19, 2007.

an exceptionally dedicated commitment from its mediator and participants could ensure its continuation.

Although the information about personal strain and sacrifices was often recounted for the purpose of pointing out the accomplishments of a particular person, or the group as a whole, there was also an accompanying concern that this should not have been the case—that the process should have been able to function without the personal sacrifices of some of its participants.

A qualified success

For the stakeholders who stayed involved for the entire twelve months, the process was, on the whole, extremely positive; they viewed it as a transformative moment in Parkdale's history. They believed that the mediation had successfully engaged a community experiencing a total breakdown and created an opening and template for constructive communication and problem solving.

However, even the participants who spoke of the process as transformative had serious concerns. Out of the nine in-depth interviews with people involved in the resolution process, each one qualified their support of the mediation by noting that there were problems with the process. Many of these concerns were related to an absence of a budget for the resolution process. This absence had an impact not only on the individuals participating in the negotiations but also on levels of participation from the wider community, especially for stakeholder groups such as tenants. Without appropriate resources, there was no compensation for time, travel expenses or meals, and this had a disproportionate impact on the participation of marginalized and low-income participants.⁸⁰

Maureen Fair noted that tenants who were not affiliated with an organization often required support in attending meetings. Community agencies, such as St. Christopher House, were cognizant of the necessity of tenant's involvement and would therefore offer support, whenever possible.⁸¹ This support ensured that tenants were present throughout the process but it did not solve all the problems of representation or participation among more marginalized stakeholder groups.

⁸⁰ Information gathered from multiple interviews with representatives from community agencies, and advocacy groups, January-February 2007.

⁸¹ Interview with Maureen Fair, February 22, 2007.

Characterizing the perspective of a qualified success is the Statement of Support written by the community agency stakeholders and presented to City Council on October 22, 1999. It reads:

Should you be happy with this report? No! The process was flawed and grossly under-funded. All members of this group have had grave misgivings throughout this process because of the lack of resources allocated to the mediation group.... Nonetheless, those of us who have continued believe that this report does not represent the end of the road but instead a good starting point. We are optimistically giving our support and endorsement not so much for the report but the process that the report recommends; that is, a Parkdale specific group that can forge Parkdale specific solutions.⁸²

It is worth noting that participants remained firm in their support for the process in spite of its flaws. This sustained commitment can be explained by three factors: the recognition that if these issue were going to be solved, it was going to have to come from within the community; the mediation's correlation with interest-based negotiation theory; and the transformative effect of breaking down stereotypes and building connections between groups.

Prior to the conflict resolution process there was not only a palpable frustration with the inadequacy of City policies in remedying the issues surrounding Parkdale's rooming houses and bachelorettes but also a real fear that this entire housing stock was threatened. Many community members saw this resolution process as the last hope for undoing more than twenty years of divisions and hostility and creating workable solutions that could protect this vulnerable housing stock. It had become clear that if change was going to happen, it was going to have to come from within the community, not from officials at City Hall.

John Schaffter's approach to the mediation adhered to the principles of interest-based negotiation theory. This was evident throughout the process and particularly in the emphasis placed on finding "win-win" policy solutions. John Schaffter commented, "The hard thing about multi-stakeholder negotiation is that people will walk away unless there is something on the table for them."⁸³ Therefore, throughout the process, the solutions that were proposed and eventually tabled were constructed to contain "something for everyone". This ensured that groups were

⁸² Unknown author, "Statement of Support for the Mediated Report & Recommendations," Presented to Toronto City Council, October 22, 1999.

⁸³ Interview with John Schaffter, January 17, 2007.

more likely to identify with the process and solutions of the resolution process as they were intrinsically connected to it.

Finally, participants in the resolution process that I interviewed spoke of the transformative effects of bringing previously feuding groups together and talking across differences, which built empathy and transformed personal views. Bruce Voogd, representative from the Roncesvalles-MacDonnell Resident's Association, and the current Chair of the Parkdale Housing Coalition, commented, "when you see how life is on a daily basis for people on the margins, you can't objectify it and just say they should be kicked out, because where are they going to go?"⁸⁴ In some cases, prior to the resolution process, groups representing the more powerful interests in Parkdale (such as the Business Improvement or Residents Association) may have been well intentioned and concerned about the living conditions of those that lived within illegal rooming houses, yet supported solutions that had negative consequences for vulnerable tenants. By bringing these perhaps well-intentioned but uninformed stakeholders together with the people who they were supposedly representing and listening to the tenant's knowledge of what would make their lives better, real opportunities for solutions and change emerged.

Evaluating the outcome

Implementing the Recommendations

A legislative change central to the implementation of the Parkdale Pilot Project was the amendment of bylaw 698-2000. This bylaw altered the definition of a rooming house from that comprising dwelling *rooms* only to a building that may also contain one or more dwelling *units*.⁸⁵ This amendment was significant in that it provided the legal definition necessary for the Parkdale Pilot Project to carry out the task of legalizing previously illegal bachelorette buildings by licensing them as rooming houses.

City Council adopted the full recommendations of the report, but the question of implementation remained. The community agencies that participated in the process delivered this statement to City Council regarding the importance of following through with the recommendations.

There is nothing in this report that has not been tried in the past.
Therefore the success of the report's recommendations will depend
on Toronto Community Council's endorsement of the report.

⁸⁴ Interview with Bruce Voogd, February 2, 2007.

⁸⁵ City of Toronto, Bylaw No. 698-2000.

Similarly, the process will only succeed if there is ongoing effort by members of the community, politicians and all city departments. We will need to be vigilant and demand that the city will work with the community.⁸⁶

The implementation of the adopted recommendations began in the early months of 2000. Sylvia Watson, who had previously worked in the City's legal department, was appointed the Director of the Parkdale Pilot Project (PPP). In the summer of 2000, Harris Ramrup became part of the PPP team, bringing with him his previous experience with Parkdale's bachelorettes and extensive knowledge of zoning, building, fire, and property codes. The first year of the project no properties went through the re-zoning process due to a lack of staff. However, 266 properties were identified for potential legalization, and contact was made with some of these owners.

Finally, in February 2001, a buildings code and a property standards inspector were hired full-time. In July 2002, Pamela Coburn, the Executive Director of Municipal Licensing and Standards, took over from Sylvia Watson on the PPP. For approximately three years the project was operational and successfully legalized 96 properties through a site-specific re-zoning that re-classified these buildings as legal rooming houses. Many of these buildings had been inaccessible to City inspectors for the previous twenty or thirty years. In legalizing the properties, it is said that the living standards in the buildings improved and the owners could now be held to these standards through yearly or bi-annual inspections.⁸⁷ Mr. Ramrup explained that it was through a process of building trust and goodwill between the staff of the PPP and the owners of the buildings that so many properties were legalized in such a short time.

As originally intended, operating alongside the PPP was the Parkdale Housing Committee. The Housing Committee was made up of representatives from the same community organizations that had previously been involved in the Conflict Resolution Process, including four positions for tenant representatives. The Housing Committee, the community of Parkdale (or those who came to the public meetings), and City Council had to approve all applications for site-specific re-zoning of bachelorette buildings. Illustrative of a general shift in the neighbourhood is that in the four years of operation and the legalization of 96 buildings, the PPP never had one application rejected by any of these bodies.⁸⁸

⁸⁶ "Statement of Support for the Mediated Report & Recommendations," October 1999.

⁸⁷ Interview with Harris Ramrup, February 1, 2007.

⁸⁸ Interview with Harris Ramrup, February 1, 2007.

In spite of this progress, the PPP lost its two full-time inspectors and Director in late 2004 and staff was reduced to Harris Ramrup and one assistant.⁸⁹ Although many illegal properties remained with only occasional access to City inspectors and insufficient staff, the PPP effectively ground to a halt, although it technically remained operational until December 2006. During my interview with Mr. Ramrup on February 1, 2007, the phone rang numerous times with inquiries from owners about legalizing their building. The interest and need remains, but no staff or budget is now there to meet this need.

A lack of long-term support

The reasons why the Parkdale Pilot Project was abandoned by the City is an important question, yet one without an easy answer. In attempting to answer the question of why the Parkdale Pilot Project was under-resourced and ultimately abandoned, I was in touch with current and former employees of the City's Planning department. Due to a high level of turnover, and a general unwillingness to speak about this issue, it was hard to assess the reasons why the support for Parkdale Pilot Project was short-lived. The Parkdale Pilot Project was shifted between City departments and fell under the supervision of several City department managers who may have had no understanding of the project's history, broader goals, or significance for the neighbourhood of Parkdale. The constant change in funding and staff had an unquestionably negative effect on the Parkdale Pilot Project. The chair of the Parkdale Housing Committee, Bruce Voogd, suspected that City planning tended to look negatively at the project because it didn't follow typical planning procedures.⁹⁰ What is clear is that the City departments that had the highest levels of interaction and responsibility for the project—Planning and Municipal Licensing and Standards—did not prioritize the goals or outcomes of the Parkdale Pilot Project.

Pamela Coburn, former Executive Director of Municipal Licensing and Standards at the City, noted the negative impact that this lack of support could have on the community members that had been so dedicated to seeing the resolution process through.

The exercise of creating the project and empowering the community will have the reverse effect if the people who came and told their stories and worked to stay engaged, and pushed and pushed....And then the political motivation wanes, turnover, nobody on Council championing the process, never any money flowing....then those people who were at the table, who were

⁸⁹ Interview with Harris Ramrup, February 1, 2007.

⁹⁰ Interview with Bruce Voogd, February 2, 2007.

stoked to put in their time, what lesson did they learn from this?
The old “can’t fight City Hall crap.”⁹¹

The failure to maintain the Parkdale Pilot Project left both visible and invisible negative consequences. Most obviously, the lack of long term support left the process of legalization unfinished and the ability to assess the completed Pilot Project as a model for other Toronto neighbourhoods a lost opportunity. However, it could also be read as a symbolic yet meaningful act, revealing the inability of the City to prioritize its commitment to communities over a bureaucratic system.

Questioning the impact

Assessing the full effect of the mediation process also requires knowledge of how these initiatives impacted the lives of those who stood to gain or lose the most from the licensing of bachelorettes—the tenants who live(d) in them. It is therefore important to ask: are the tenants of bachelorettes better off because of the Conflict Resolution Process and the programs that evolved out of it?

In order to answer this question, it must be placed in a larger context. Over the last ten years, government-sponsored social housing programs have ground to a halt,⁹² producing no new housing in the City of Toronto and sending the waiting list for rent-geared-to-income housing soaring to over 60,000 applicants.⁹³ It is within this context that the critical importance of protecting existing affordable housing must be viewed; however, the question of the best way to do this is disputed.

Some housing advocates argue that licensing has negatively impacted the rooming house stock. Since the introduction of the first bylaw in 1974, the number of legal rooming houses across the City has steadily declined. Therefore, the creation of additional regulatory frameworks is seen as a further hazard to rooming houses. Others argue that licensing provides a necessary mechanism to ensure that landlords are not exploiting tenants and that people are living in buildings that meet basic health and safety standards.

⁹¹ Interview with Pamela Coburn, January 29, 2007.

⁹² Ontario Non-Profit Housing Association, “Timeline: History Social Housing in Ontario,” Available at: http://www.onpha.on.ca/about_non_profit_housing/history/doc/timeline.pdf.

⁹³ Social Housing Strategists in association with Richard Drdla Associates Inc., “City of Toronto: Rooming House Issues and Future Options: Final Report,” Toronto: April 2004: 19.

Organizations such as Rupert Community Residential Services have argued that you can't solve housing and poverty problems through land use mechanisms or the enforcement of static standards. They say that licensing diverts attention away from the most important issues affecting rooming house tenants—the provision of appropriate support services. In a submission to City Council regarding the adoption of the conflict resolution process's recommendations, Rupert Community Services argued:

It is possible for people to be housed safely and healthily in units that do not meet a single one of these regulations. It is also possible to find people in dangerous, unhealthy situations posing risks for the whole community, even though they live in houses that meet every requirement in the bylaw. While the city fiddles with applications and verifications, rooming houses may still burn down.⁹⁴

However, in interviews conducted with social service providers who had been involved in the resolution process, there was consensus that licensing rooming houses and bachelorettes was an important first step to maintaining standards and safety within these buildings. Maureen Fair, of St. Christopher House, responded to the criticisms noted above, arguing that given the climate in Parkdale at the time and the City's 1998 re-zoning proposal, there was a real fear that the entire bachelorette housing stock was going to be lost. Protecting the housing stock was the principal priority and licensing was a way to achieve this in a way that every stakeholder in the process would accept.⁹⁵

It is also important to note that the Parkdale Pilot Project's regulatory regime was far more flexible, and case-specific than anything that had previously been used to license rooming houses. What is problematic is that no follow-up study on the effects of the Parkdale Pilot Project was ever undertaken; the project tapered off, incomplete, leaving its influence known only to those directly involved in the project.

It is in this context that the question of the benefit to tenants must be placed. There are no easy answers. We know that since the implementation of the Parkdale Pilot Project, an additional 800 units have been added to the legal housing stock. However, whether these additions have resulted in better living standards for tenants is another question. Given the shortage of affordable housing, the retention of housing, any housing, seems to take precedence over all else.

⁹⁴ Robert Keel, "Submission to Rupert Community Residential Services, Inc. in response to the Report on the Parkdale Conflict Mediation Process, 9 November 1999." 2.

⁹⁵ Interview with Maureen Fair, February 22, 2007.

Lessons and implications for planning

Community-based conflict mediation is not commonly used in planning. Rather, engaging community members is generally left to public meetings focusing on one particular issue where the extent of engagement is limited to, “I’m here to tell you about this; what do you think?”⁹⁶ Perhaps even more fundamentally, the underlying reasons *why* different stakeholder groups are opposed to a particular planning initiative or policy, or to a particular group claiming space within the neighbourhood, is rarely examined. Planning is seldom concerned with or given the space to understand why hostility and conflict emerge between groups, its effects on various stakeholder groups, or how these underlying issues can be addressed and remedied.

The consequences and inadequacies of planning’s usual approach to community conflict is exemplified in the history leading to the conflict mediation process. Prior to the conflict resolution process, the City had poured hundreds of thousands of dollars into “solving” Parkdale’s problem of rooming houses and bachelorettes. The question of what exactly is the problem with rooming houses and bachelorettes, and who gets to define it, was never examined. Yet in spite of this porous/inadequate definition of the problem, the City supported legislative “quick fixes”, campaigns of targeted prosecutions, and numerous staff reports and task forces that recycled the same solutions.

The community meetings that were held in Parkdale regarding the “problem” of rooming houses and bachelorettes were, in reality, biased information sessions that merely informed community members of a predetermined approach, stoking rather than resolving the existing conflict in Parkdale. It is only when conflict escalated to an explosive level that the City decided to act rather than simply defuse and react. The success of the Parkdale resolution process, and the model of interest-based, multi-stakeholder negotiation, provide both a sobering “reality-check” of the extensive work that is required to resolve neighbourhood conflict as well as an exciting example of the transformation that it can offer.

Parkdale’s history of conflict, and its experience of mediated dispute resolution, challenges the “quick fix” mentality of planning by revealing that only through the painstaking act of getting different groups to talk to each other and moving past the rhetoric, anger and mistrust, a real community dialogue emerged. If the City had taken even a fraction of the money it had poured into traditional planning approaches over the preceding twenty years, and used it to develop

⁹⁶ Interview with Dave McKillop, January 19, 2007.

resourced, on-going, and representative community mediations, it is possible that the conflict would never have reached the destructive impasse that did occur.

Perhaps the most apparently simplistic yet essential lesson that this history offers is that relationships and patterns of interaction within a community matter. Literature on gentrification has identified patterns of isolation and segregation of groups, or a “tectonic social structure”, underlying some of the most conflict-laden and exclusionary examples of gentrification.⁹⁷ In this context, the process of bringing groups together in a non-superficial way to talk through and across differences has a role in reversing and preventing the most exclusionary affects of gentrification. Emerging out of the Parkdale conflict resolution process was an acknowledgement that every stakeholder group had an intrinsic role in determining and solving the neighbourhood’s problems. This recognition is an essential building-block in creating inclusive neighbourhoods.

Final Thoughts

The conflict and divisions that took place in Parkdale over the last thirty years were specific to the particularities of the neighbourhood but in general reflect conflicts and divisions in any diverse and densely populated urban community.

Unfortunately, typical as well were the attempts made to solve the problems that arose. These attempts often created more and greater problems than existed before. What was significant in Parkdale was not merely the opposing interests and viewpoints articulated by different stakeholders but the eventual attempt in 1998 to come together and resolve disputes. The conflict resolution process that took place over twelve months was an unusual exercise in dispute resolution not only because the process led to at least a modestly successful outcome but more importantly because all major stakeholders sat around a table for twelve months, got to know each other, learned to appreciate at least some of each other’s realities and therefore laid the groundwork for sustained, healthy community relationships. A concrete example of the expression of this on-going relationship is that when the City expropriated 1495 Queen Street West in July 2006, a former rooming house that had sat abandoned since a major fire in September 1998, to build supportive affordable housing, no group attempted to block this decision.⁹⁸

⁹⁷ Slater, “Municipally Managed Gentrification,” 321.

⁹⁸ Interview with Victor Willis, February 15, 2007.

The Parkdale conflict resolution process was an imperfect success that offers an exciting model of community transformation. Given the lack of resources that people involved in the process talked about over and over again, it is possible to imagine how much more far reaching the process could have been in Parkdale, or would be in other situations, if proper resources and on-going support were provided. The 1998 resolution process demonstrates the benefits of investing in local solutions to local problems by engaging the community and pushing it to move beyond recycled stereotypes and entrenched positions.

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