

## **Finding Beauty: Toronto's *Clean & Beautiful City Initiative***

### **Introduction**

Mayor David Miller and the City of Toronto embarked on an ambitious program to create a *Clean and Beautiful city* (C&B) as one of nine municipal priorities for the 2003 – 2006 elected term. The program brings a *beauty lens* to all public realm initiatives. The program sees a shift of responsibility of *beauty* from public to private sector. A concomitant private sector education for advocacy/ownership of public realm *beauty* is required as well as public willingness to take action.

According to the Mayor, "at its heart, C&B reaffirms the City's commitment to the public realm. It is meant to give Torontonians new pride in their city."<sup>1</sup> To move this initiative forward, the Mayor established a roundtable on the C&B City to advise the Mayor and Council and to engage and partner with the community on policies, programs and activities that will result in a clean, vibrant and beautiful city.<sup>2</sup> In addition, an action plan was established, which saw the coordination of city activities toward the objectives of achieving a C&B city. The C&B City program for the City of Toronto was approved by City Council in late 2004.<sup>3</sup> The five-point action plan was developed to direct the activities of the program and organize work into specific categories: sweep it, design it, build it, grow it and celebrate it.<sup>4</sup> The categories suggest areas of improvement, some of them in the realm of litter / graffiti / poster control, some in the area of greening and planting, some directed toward awards rewarding excellence, and some in the area of 'beautification.'

In 2005 considerable work was undertaken to address litter, cut grass, plant flowerbeds, beautify streetscapes, remove and transform graffiti. Certain activities were intended to bring immediate attention to issues and provide quick fixes, such as the '20-minute Toronto makeover.' Other projects, developed in conjunction with the Design Exchange (DX) and *Canadian Architect* magazine undertook a design competition to explore opportunities for neglected spaces in the city. 'The orphan spaces project'<sup>5</sup> drew attention to longer-term issues such as improvement of quality of life and economic development through design initiatives.

One project – the Neighbourhood Beautification Program – was a pilot project designed to engage communities to beautify under-utilized spaces in their neighbourhoods.<sup>6</sup>

### **Toronto's Neighbourhood Beautification Program**

Launched in 2005, the Neighbourhood Beautification Program was designed to engage Toronto communities to beautify underutilized spaces in each of the City's wards. This program complements the City's increased efforts to clean and revitalize overlooked City-owned spaces. The program is facilitated through the C&B Secretariat, however its success is dependent upon the support and leadership of the local Councillor and implementation and ongoing maintenance commitment by a keen community group.

In the initial period, \$1500 was provided to each ward. 14 projects were completed in 2005 and another 30 projects were completed in 2006. In 2007, after the municipal election, the Neighbourhood Beautification Program's Community Projects Initiative was renewed and currently provides up to \$3,000.00 to each ward for community-based improvement projects. Funding will be allocated to a community project best suiting the project criteria.<sup>7, 8</sup>

### **Summer 2006, Ryerson University Research Project**

With the initiation of 14 projects in the Neighbourhood Beautification Program in 2005 and the addition of 30 projects in 2006, it was clear that there was considerable community

interest in C&B activities. However, the City was not certain about the impact of these projects and whether indeed they were contributing to the beauty of Toronto. While clear measures of "clean" had been developed and were being applied<sup>9</sup> no measures of the impact of "beauty" had yet been developed.

A collaborative project was developed between Toronto's Ryerson University, Department of Architectural Science and the C&B City Secretariat of the City of Toronto. Working with Elyse Parker, Project Manager of the C&B Secretariat, the Principal Investigator (PI), George Kapelos, Associate Professor in the Department developed a four part project. Funding was secured through the Ryerson University Summer Research Assistant Program, with support-in-kind being provided by the C&B Secretariat. Iain Myrans a fourth year student in the Bachelor of Urban and Regional Planning program was engaged by the project and undertook the field research for the project under the direction of the PI.

### ***Research Project Objectives***

Traditionally, beauty is viewed subjectively, influenced by cultural/historical/philosophical constructs. Clean is measurable, but can we determine if Toronto is becoming more beautiful? This project sought to provide a framework for defining measures of beauty, gathering data on these measures, exploring case studies and providing outcomes that would assist shape municipal policy, future initiatives and benchmarking in the area of beauty.

The following were the project objectives:

1. A literature search in the area of evaluation methods for non-quantifiable attributes, with a particular emphasis on ideas of 'beauty' in the context of urban beautification;
2. An examination, classification and evaluation of the 44 completed and near-completion projects that had been funded through the initiative;
3. A compilation of documentation in the form of case studies for selected projects, including site photography;
4. The preparation, administration and evaluation of a survey instrument (in the form of a telephone or in person interview) to be directed to project stakeholders on the nature of urban beauty; and
5. The establishment of goals, objectives and measurable outcomes for delivering 'beauty' in the urban context.
- 6.

The project is ongoing. Objectives 1 (partial) 2, 3 and 4 (partial) were met in the summer of 2006. Objective 4 is currently being completed and Objective 5 will be completed later in 2007. The project is in three parts: 'finding beauty,' 'revealing beauty' and 'measuring beauty.' This paper describes part one, 'finding beauty.'

### ***Research Methodology***

This project utilizes qualitative research, relying upon studied observation and interview, survey material review and case study analysis. This inductive approach seeks to identify key themes, develop coding schemes (as applicable) leading to a synthesis of material on aspects of beauty. The approach draws upon interpretivism derived from phenomenological traditions of Edmund Husserl and Martin Heidegger, whose goal is to 'understand the complex world of lived experience from the point of view of those who live it.'<sup>10</sup> The focus for the project is on Toronto's public realm notably the city street and those projects visible from the public realm. These corridors are the most visible but most challenging loci for beautification.

### ***Case Study: Approach and Development***

Following the approach developed by Robert E. Stake<sup>11</sup> the 44 projects were identified, classified and categorized. Projects were distributed across all wards of the City of Toronto and typed into one of the following:

- gardens (gardens and garden parkettes)
- landmarks (monuments, gateways and signage)
- greening (roadside/boulevard planting, pruning and grass management)
- murals (murals and wall paintings).

Further, the projects were assessed as to whether they could be seen as a priority project assessed against the City's Official Plan, which established the need to strengthen a better quality of life for residents in 13 of Toronto's neighbourhoods.<sup>12</sup> Stake's collective case study approach was followed. Projects were initially divided geographically, to reflect the diverse neighbourhoods of the City of Toronto. Subsequently one project of each type was identified in each of the four geographic districts. Each group of projects was subsequently reviewed and four case studies were finalized as the best, typical projects within their type and area. While this methodology established clear parameters for the cases to be put forward, the selected cases were also reviewed against other criteria, particularly to ensure that case studies chosen would also be reflective of a range of stakeholder participants

RYERSON UNIVERSITY		Department of Architectural Science		Ryerson Research Assistant Program / Summer 2006												
"Seeing The Beautiful City": Summer 2006 Research Project, Ryerson Department of Architectural Science / City of Toronto Clean & Beautiful City Secretariat.																
Past Clean and Beautiful Neighborhood Beautification Projects																
July 5, 2006 (DRAFT)																
Prepared By: Iain Myrns																
	Complete	Project Type <sup>1</sup>	Ward	Location / Address	Priority <sup>2</sup>	Property Ownership	Reason Site Was Identified	Initiative / Undertaken / Status To be Taken	Budgeted Expenses (Municipal)	Community Leadership, and Private Partnerships	City Departments & Services	Other City Effects	Press	Mayor/Council Initiations	Players & Contacts	
N O R T H		1. Jane & Finch Beautification (N)	N	Landmark	York West Ward 8	Jane & Finch	Y	City	Priority Area Needing Municipal Investment. Community identified.	-To build a walk of fame recognizing prominent members of the community. -Street trees and a cross-walk treatment and new sidewalks may become part of the project.	\$1,500	Super Latin Arts World community group	Transportation Services	20 Bell Boxes with more to come paired by graffiti artists in association with Bell Canada.	None	Magie, Super Latin World Arts Festival 2004-0503
		2. Wilson Park Blvd. Parkette (N)	N	Garden	York Centre Ward 9	Southwest corner of Dufferin & Wilson at Wilson Park Boulevard	N	City	Selected by Councilors Office because of a perceived need to recreate green space in this high-traffic area.	-Add colour by building a sustainable garden with a wind-rose as a central feature. -TTC Stop and Newspaper Stands moved	\$1,500	\$30,000 from First Pro	Parks / Recreation Transportation Services Forestry	Murray Road Enhancement Greening Project \$36,000 in trees from Forestry. Donations from Teddy Centre	Pending	
		3. Bathurst/Wilson Mural (N) partnerships/community and corporate involvement. multiple levels of government, media attention.	Y	Mural	York Centre Ward 10	NE Corner of Bathurst St. and Wilson Ave.	N	W&MTD Adjacent Park City	Selected by the Councilors office and the Community.	-Paint large mural on northern 401 retaining wall.	\$1,500	\$10,000 & Paint from Benjamin Moore Ontario Ministry of Transportation (Donated space on retaining wall)	Parks / Recreation Transportation Services	Mural to be selected. Councilor has offered \$25,000 in grants from local businesses. City/TVC/TV attached the launch.	Many local and city players Mayor attended launch on November 19, 2005	Ian Leverthal, Artist & Member of Mayor's Round Table on a Beautiful City - Issue 7 (October/November '05)
		4. Belvidere Orphan Space (N) -Using beautification as a remedy for crime	Y	Greening (Crime prevention)	Eglinton / Lawrence Ward 15	Belvidere and Oakwood Streets (501 Oakwood St.)	Y	TCHC	Legal activity (drug dealing, etc.) littering. Selected by community	-Pruning Trees -Grass Cutting -weaving railing to deter loitering.	\$1,500	5 Parks Community Action Group	Transportation Services Toronto Police Service	Left to Belvidere project (below)	Pending	
		4a. Lawrence Heights Garden Spin-off Project (N)	N	Garden	Eglinton / Lawrence Ward 15	Blossomfield / Pennington in Lawrence Heights	Y	TCHC	Identified by TCHC as an important location to foster a sense of community and help with violence and crime.	-New plants, benches, and lighting are to be installed. -Landscaping design complete (on website) -New sidewalk installation	\$0	\$87,000 Rio Can Real Estate Investment Trust (donated funding & trees) Toronto Community Housing Corporation (TCHC) and the local Community Association.	Transportation Services Toronto Police Service	None to date.	City/TV attended 'ground breaking'	Mayor likely to attend the launch. Janice Waldman (jwaldr@cityoftoronto.ca) as liaison TCHC or Community Group Leader? Toronto landscape architect produced the landscaping design.

<sup>1</sup> Typologies: Gardens=Gardens & Garden Parkettes; Landmarks=Art Installations, Monuments, Gateways, and Signage; Greenings=Planting, Pruning & Grass Management; Mural = Murals & Wall Paintings  
<sup>2</sup> The city's official plan has identified the need to strengthen and ensure a better quality of life for residents of thirteen Toronto neighborhoods and indicates that "strategies may be needed to revitalize and improve these priority neighbourhoods to develop new parks, upgrade buildings and improve community-based services, streets, sidewalks, bikeways and pathways."

CASE STUDY SELECTION: GREEN = RECOMMENDED CASE STUDY; ORANGE = PROJECT OF POSSIBLE INTEREST

Sample Page, Evaluation Matrix

**Survey: On Urban Beauty**

Concurrent with the analysis of the 44 projects and their classification and preparation as case studies, a survey instrument was developed. The interview process was modeled on the semi-structured interview process as described in Berg.<sup>13</sup> Berg proposes a methodology for interview schedule design that involves identifying broad categories, or topics, around which questions should be framed. Each category should contain as many different types of questions as possible. Types include, 'essential questions,' 'extra questions,' 'throw-away questions' and 'probing questions.' "Essential questions" "concern the central focus of the study ... [and] are geared toward eliciting specific desired information." "Extra questions" help to ensure "reliability of responses." "Throw-away questions" "may be general questions used to develop rapport between interviewers and subjects ... [they can help] set the

interviewing pace or allow a change in focus in the interview.” ‘Probing questions’ “provide interviewers with a way to draw out more complete stories from subjects ... [and help] to elaborate on what they have already answered.”<sup>14</sup>

The format and methodology of the ‘semi-standardized’ interview allows for the interviewer to pursue a number of pre-set questions, while allowing for the interviewer to stray from a list of essential questions on the schedule to elicit more qualitative data through probes or informal questioning. Furthermore, semi-standardized interviews are most appropriate for this form of phenomenological research.<sup>15</sup>

Two distinct groups were interviewed. The first group was identified through the development of case studies. This group comprised the individual beatification stakeholders, such as local residents, business people, project proponents and elected officials. The second group was the group of citizens and elected officials who had been selected by the City Mayor to be members of the Roundtable on the C&B City.

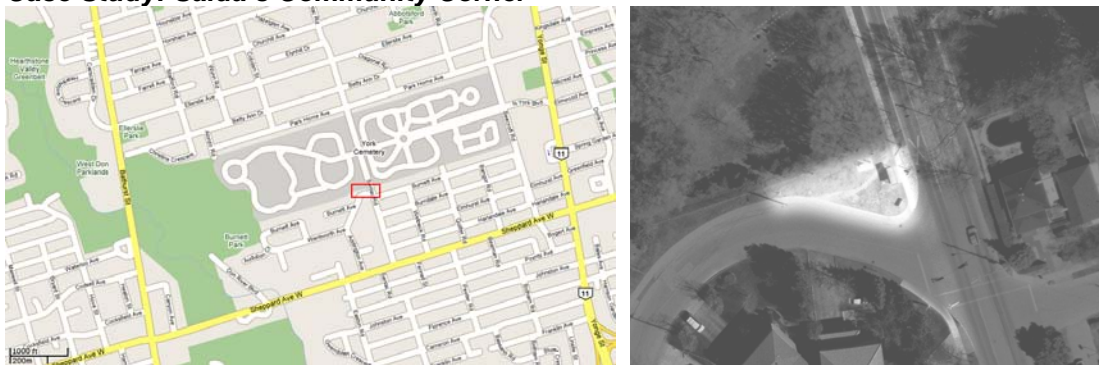
The interviews comprised 39 questions, categorized into five groups: introductory, project-specific, urban beauty (benchmarking), Toronto and its beauty and demographics / conclusions. Interviews took place mostly by telephone and each interview was recorded and transcribed. The response of all interviewees remains anonymous, except for the Mayor, who agreed to have his name attributed to his comments.

Interview responses are currently being assessed and evaluated. Preliminary findings are included in the discussions on the case studies, below.

### **Case Studies**

The following case studies typify the community projects undertaken in the Neighbourhood Beautification Program. They were selected as representative of the types of community-based projects which are at the heart of this program.

#### ***Case Study: Saida's Community Corner***



**Location and Aerial Photograph  
(City of Toronto)**

Saida's Community Corner is located in Northern Toronto on the north-west corner of Senlac Road and Burnett Avenue. With its five lanes, Senlac Road is the predominant feature in the landscape and is an important north-south traffic corridor while Burnett Avenue is a lower-tier residential roadway<sup>16</sup>. Burnett Avenue continues on both sides of Senlac Road but at slightly offset positions. The western portion of Burnett Avenue is curved to minimize this offset for motorists and also to reduce the grade of a shallow hill. This has inadvertently created an orphaned space on the north-west corner of the intersection. The site is located adjacent to the south edge of York Cemetery and at the northern entrance to a neighbourhood of about 200 single family dwellings backing onto Burnett Park. This corner has also served as a resting point for senior citizens living in a nearby residence to the south. The property is

owned by the City of Toronto and has been an important cross-road for over 200 years when Joseph and Catherine Shepard moved to the community following an 1802 land grant from the British Government. The project's original name was to be *Saida's Community Corner*, named after Joseph Shepard's granddaughter.

Before the local ratepayers association became involved, the site was vacant and used for service. It contained a TTC bus shelter, utility boxes, a concrete bench with attached advertising space, abandoned shrubbery, numerous man-holes, and a dirt path. The existence of the path indicated that pedestrians frequently interacted with the space while traveling to and from the adjacent neighbourhood on foot.

Work on this project is ongoing. Completed beautification initiatives include the brick paving of the dirt path, a new bus shelter, the removal of the concrete bench and advertising, and the planting of trees in strategic locations to obscure unsightly elements. Concrete pads have been poured at two locations – one for a new traditional park bench, the other for the installation of public art. Extending from the south side of the new brick path will be new flower gardens. All of the remaining space will receive new sod and utility boxes will be further screened through the use of vine covered lattice.

The original application for funding came from two individuals in the community who were concerned about the corner. "It's a dead-end to a community of about 200 homes and [it] was a real eye-sore," one local resident told the research team. The application was selected by the councillor out of a pool of thirty others and the individuals recognized that more financial and human resources would be required to implement the vision. A '*matrixed organization*' was created whereby others living in the community with the appropriate expertise were asked to become involved. Engineers, landscape architects and gardeners were approached for assistance. Interviewees indicated that as more people became interested fundraising efforts increased and involved walking tours of city gardens. In total the community raised approximately \$15,000 for the project.

*Goals:* The application submitted to the Councillor and to the C&B Secretariat indicated that a long-term vision for the corner had been established by the community. The vision called for the planting of trees, low maintenance shrubs, a perennial garden, and a natural walking path. This vision was developed to provide passers-by with a 'pleasing view' and to create a 'welcoming entry to the community' while also providing local residents with a place to sit and 'watch the world go by' on this 'tiny gem' of public space.<sup>17</sup>

*Success:* The interviewees cited the "coming together of the community" as the greatest success of the project. "Everyone's come together to support the project the best way they can," the researchers were told. This community involvement had led to the completion of site clean up, the installation of the new path, and trees.

Due to financial constraints, the project was split into three phases with the next phases to include bench installation, gardens, and public art. "It was a financial issue," one interviewee stated, "we would have liked to have done it all at once but we didn't have that much funding so we phased the project in." Interviewees did say that there were some benefits associated with the slower pace of the project though. These included greater public involvement and interest and broader fundraising techniques. Despite funding concerns the project has become a "talking point" within the community and there have been many visual improvements to the corner already.

*Impact:* Community Corner, researchers were told, will ultimately beautify the neighbourhood by establishing "a presence or gateway into the community." Local residents believe that beauty can create this presence by establishing a sense of "delight," "pleasure," and "satisfaction" in those passing by.

Interviewees did not feel that the project, on its own, had an impact on Toronto's overall level of beauty. "It's just a little project. I see [another project] the mural on Bathurst Street having a much greater impact on the city". Still, the interviewees also indicated that there are many orphaned spaces around the city and that as those spaces are adopted by residents it will encourage others to do the same. We were told that projects like these "provoke pride, and when you have pride in your city you tend to take better care of it."

Those involved with this beautification project claim that the Community Corner will improve the quality of life for residents all year long. When asked if the project would be beautiful in the winter respondents stated that it would be beautiful in the spring, summer, and fall and that the new path would be practical in the winter, supporting the view that the site's primary purpose is gateway and resting spot on a seasonal basis. Future installation of public art may improve winter beauty along with the new bus shelter.

### ***Bell Canada Utility Box Urban Art Project (Pilot Project)***

The Bell Canada Utility Box Urban Art Project now includes 53 Bell Canada Outside Plant Interface (OPI) boxes. These boxes exist across the city to serve as interface points for land-line telephone connections to local residents and businesses. The boxes are approximately four feet wide and five feet tall, painted brown and resting atop concrete bases. OPI boxes are typically located adjacent to sidewalks and roadways in plain view and allow easy access by Bell Canada technicians. The project began with an initial two boxes sponsored by the City. The pilot was then expanded to 12 boxes with an additional 10 funded through the C&B program across Ward 19, a downtown west-end ward.

Before C&B the OPI boxes were seen by graffiti artists and taggers as blank canvases, and to advertisers as blank billboard space onto which posters could be pasted. Most downtown Bell-boxes would frequently be tagged or postered while clean-up and maintenance by Bell Canada was infrequent despite the prominent location of their OPI boxes in highly visible sites within the public realm. The City of Toronto recently harmonized its bylaws that deal with vandalism including graffiti, making it the land owner's responsibility for the clean-up of vandalized sites. Jason Laszlo, a city staffer, told researchers that this law is "a bitter pill to swallow" for small business owners, particularly when they receive a ticket for a violation and are required to pay for clean-up particularly when the OPI box across the street remains covered in tags and Bell appears to have done little in the way of clean-up.

With permission from Bell Canada, the city commissioned the original painting of twelve boxes as part of a two-phase pilot project. The selected OPI boxes are located in neighbourhood at various high-visibility locations along major roads such as Bloor, College and Queen Streets.

The project originated when a call was received by the Deputy Mayor from a constituent who was complaining about an OPI box on his lawn that was being continuously vandalized with obscenities and tags. The constituent cited a project in Winnipeg where the city was using art to mitigate graffiti on traffic-control boxes located at major intersections. The Deputy Mayor, Joe Pantalone, who represents Ward 19, along with a keen and concerned staff, recognized the opportunity to deter vandalism in the ward. This project was essentially a top-down structure where government took the reins and commissioned a local community group, *Style in Progress*, to paint an number of OPI boxes. The small murals were each designed by an artist associated with *Style in Progress* and the designs were presented to the Councillor's Office and those residents and businesses that would be immediately affected. *Style in Progress* originated out of "a need for a not-for profit run for the artists by the artists that could support graffiti artists and other growing aspects of hip-hop culture in Toronto."

The foremost goal was to mitigate graffiti and vandalism on the OPI boxes. Two initial tests were conducted, and *Style in Progress* and the Deputy Mayor's staff monitored their impacts. Lessons learned from the first phase were applied to another ten OPI boxes as phase two of the pilot. These latter ten were funded through the C&B Initiative. Another city staffer also told researchers that during a conversation with an artist he had told her that the program had turned his life around, legitimized his art, and saved him from the growing gang culture on Toronto's streets. To Bell Canada, it was seen as an opportunity to invest "in the communities [they] serve.... and demonstrate that care in a very tangible way," a press release stated.

*Style in Progress* has goals of its own. The Harmonizing of Toronto's graffiti by-laws made it more difficult for artists to get legal wall space on which to paint. The group hoped that the project would help boost public awareness of the art and its potential to freely engage the public in a positive way. They also saw a potential to expand the project to a wider geographic area which, if successful, would show that the City of Toronto could "have respect for [graffiti art], and keep the city clean while finding space for the graffiti artists." *Style in progress* argues that public space should be about "community space" and not just "advertising space". The organization feels that the Bell Canada Urban Art Project has the ability to begin creating the community space they desire.

Today 53 OPI boxes have been painted by Toronto-based graffiti artists with the help of *Style in Progress*. Box designs are abstract, cartoon-like, or realistic. Subjects include portraits of musicians, flying school busses, and images representing community culture through sketches.

The researchers observed a number of sites to assess the impact of the box paintings, most of which were completed a year ago. Unfortunately a number of the boxes appear to have been posterized on, and in some cases graffiti has re-surfaced on the back-sides of the boxes where sufficient blank space existed to insert a tag.

Once again, those interviewed believe that their project has been successful in achieving most goals. First, both the Councillor's Office and *Style in Progress* believe that the project has been "successful in limiting vandalism" while also providing a "balance" between the small shop owner who receives a violation and the large corporate citizen with huge amounts of infrastructure that must be maintained.

Second, *Style in Progress* believes that there has been great success in motivating artists who are not used to working with the city to do so in a productive, artistic manner that serves both urban-artists and the surrounding communities. Researchers have been told that those communities have also developed a sense of neighbourhood pride with regards to their protection of the boxes and their role in their painting. Community members would bring artists food and drink while they were painting the OPI boxes. A sense of ownership amongst residents has been created, researchers were told. One member of *Style in Progress* was told by a resident that "someone put a poster up on one of [the boxes] and we ripped it down." That member also told researchers that "there is a lot of ownership in that they (the communities) feel attached to the artwork now."

The Deputy Mayor's office also discussed lessons learned. While the residential pilot was successful, the neighbourhood took ownership of the project, and graffiti artists and taggers avoided the murals, the commercial pilot outside of a Toronto nightclub was far less successful. The commercial pilot was quickly covered with the posters of those advertising to the club's patrons. As the Councillor's office stated, this tells us about what types of vandalism murals can prevent: "taggers, the kids with spray paint; these guys respected the art... [but] the posters are financially driven." Now, commercial areas are carefully

considered before they are selected as mural sites. While in the field, researchers also found that posters were a problem. While many had been torn down, paint was chipped, or glue remained. Few boxes were vandalized with graffiti.

This project offers a number of insights. First, there is the question as to whether the boxes should be allowed to exist at all in the public realm. No answer to this question appears imminent. Is the solution proposed the most appropriate? Should money be put into maintenance or should more emphasis be paid to by-law enforcement. Would new by-laws prohibiting posterage, with stiff fines, be appropriate as a deterrent?



Before and After Images, Bell Canada OPI Boxes, Ward 19, Toronto, Ontario  
(City of Toronto)

**Case Study: Christie Gardens / CPR Underpass Mural Project**

The Christie Gardens Mural project is located on Christie Street north of Dupont Street. The murals run beneath and along-side a major east-west Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR) line and provincial utility corridor. The murals wrap around the tall retaining wall of the utility corridor to the north side of the CPR line. The view on the north side of the tracks is dominated by large hydro pylons, the tall retaining wall and the railway underpass. The south side is more pleasant with retail uses abutting the south edge of the tracks. Also, the retaining wall is not as tall to the south.

Retail and other commercial uses dominate the landscape on the south side of the tracks while the north side is residential and has become a popular retirement with a large publicly-owned retirement facility on north-east side of the project and the privately operated Christie Gardens Retirement Residence on the north-west side. The residents of Christie Gardens were responsible for the project and it has been named in recognition of their efforts.

In order to board a south-bound bus (with connections to Toronto's Bloor Street Subway Line) residents in the retirement community had to pass below the hydro-corridor, between the tall retaining walls, and move through the dark underpass. CPR had recently reconstructed the underpass and its pale new concrete walls became a prime target for vandalism, graffiti and tagging. Interviewees said that the area below the underpass was unpleasant for pedestrians and motorists alike.



As a result of C&B initiatives, extensive murals have been painted on either side of the underpass and on the adjacent retaining walls. Research notes read: "To say this is an 'underpass mural' is an under-evaluation of this project. The mural extends well beyond both sides of the underpass and around and onto a pathway on the north side [of the tracks], beyond the hydro corridor." After three months of painting, a total of 870 linear feet of retaining wall (and the underpass) had been covered with a fresh coat of paint and abstractions of sunflowers.<sup>18</sup> Artists point to two different styles on the bridge. Most noticeable are the 'childlike abstractions of sunflowers' on the exterior retaining walls. These abstractions are easy to understand, can be interpreted and enjoyed by all age groups, and add colour and brightness to the neighbourhood. The second style beneath the bridge is more 'sophisticated' and also includes sketches depicting the various stages of industrialization that Toronto has gone through. The project cost \$14,000

*Project Generator:* During an interview, an official at Christie Gardens said that the idea for the project arose when community residents wondered what to do with a construction hoarding during the building of a new residence. Like the underpass, the hoarding had been a target of graffiti vandalism. As an experiment the hoarding was painted in the hope of deterring vandals. It was successful. The local councillor, Joe Mehevic, proposed painting the entire underpass to prevent graffiti on the new walls. Management announced the project to their 450 seniors (with an average age of 87) and a number of retired artists took on the challenge.

*Project Goals:* There were a number of goals, which came from both Christie Gardens management as well as the residents. The first goal was the mitigation of graffiti vandalism. Residents wanted to see a brighter and more colourful space to improve the look of the existing grey walls and underpass. Management hoped the project would provide the residents with an opportunity to take part in active community building, part of the home's mandate. The project required an agreement for access to the walls (property owned by CPR) had to be established.

*Success:* After discussions with CPR, an agreement was reached with was one condition. The walls had to be sealed, since CPR did not want to be responsible dealing with run-off and rust. This added to the project cost which ran to \$14,000. While initiated with the standard \$1500 in C&B funds, the remainder of the project was subsidized by the Christie Gardens Special Projects Fund raised through donations, garage sales and community events.

Graffiti mitigation was the main goal of the project and residents claim that this aspect of it has been successful: "as soon as we had established our claim by putting three bands of colour over the whole wall... I thought the graffiti boys would leave us alone, and they have, they have done almost nothing." While a member of the research team was at the site, some tags and graffiti scribbles were visible but they were small in size and usually within a single colour on the wall (such as the brown centres of sunflowers). One resident said the walls had been tagged about ten times between July and mid-August, but that the tags were small and easily removable. Grace Sweatman, an official of the institution, told researchers that members of the Christie Gardens community were dedicated to keeping the wall clean; the artists told researchers that they, from time to time, touch up the paint on the walls. A sense of ownership has been instilled in what was once a grey concrete wall.

The underpass mural certainly has met the goal of creating a brighter and, more interesting place. Using beauty to create and appealing visual complexity has made for a much more pleasant and enjoyable urban environment. Most importantly, the retaining wall now acts as a gateway into the neighbourhoods north of the railway line. The scale of the project is

significant and makes an impact on the visual and aesthetic environments in the neighbourhood.

To residents the greatest success however has been the unification and participation of the entire neighbourhood. One participant reflected that “[a TTC] bus driver stopped his bus and opened the door. He told everyone in the bus about us and called to us”. Throughout the project those living in the surrounding neighbourhood would stop to talk or even lend a helping hand, “people say they’re so happy!” Whether it is the seniors returning from the bus stop, or others in the neighbourhood returning from work “it gave them a sense of relaxation to see what [was taking place]. It’s important to have the people around here interested,” hinting at the importance of community ownership of the mural. This project has been covered in both the local and city-wide media.

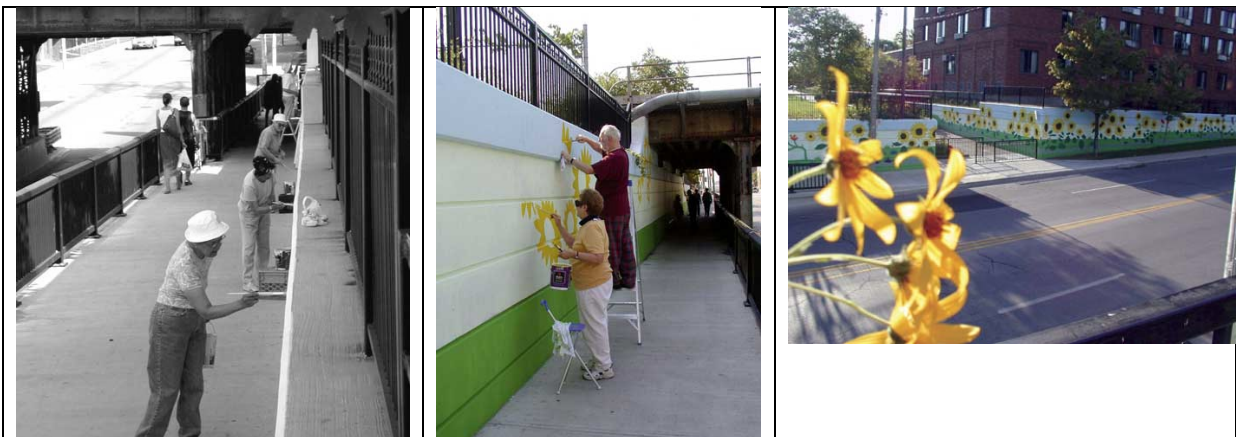
When asked how the mural beautifies the city as a whole one interviewee pointed to the silver coloured sketches located between the sunflowers beneath the bridge. These sketches examine the numerous stages in the city’s industrial history, from the introduction of the automobile to the wind turbine.

Despite these successes this mural shows that determining beauty is subjective. While talking to participants involved with another C&B mural project, it became clear that the ‘simplicity’ and ‘childlikeness’ of this mural does not appeal to all individual tastes. Some indicated that they would not appreciate a mural of this type in their neighbourhoods.

As a mural project it is visible during all seasons. A resident at Christie Gardens told researchers “that in the winter many of them (residents across the neighbourhood) said that when they came home in the evening that it was dark and now they feel [differently]”.

*Conclusions:* This project is clearly a success because it was developed at a scale that was appropriate for the neighbourhood, both physically and in terms of resources. The project balanced public participation with community building, which included extensive fundraising. The outcome was a sense of ownership in the community regarding this project.

Some respondents indicated that they would not appreciate a mural of this type in their neighbourhoods, but is it more beautiful than graffiti? Is it more beautiful than grey walls? The project could best be described as a stepping stone, being better than what was, but offering the possibility to be better yet. How do you evaluate this project against the need for public participation and public ownership of space to ensure it remains C&B?



**Christie Gardens / CPR Mural: Before, During and After  
(City of Toronto)**

**Case Study: Regal Heights Planting**

The Regal Heights Plantings were chosen as a case study because it represents one of the few projects in which one Ward divided the \$1500 to spread across two projects. Both plantings took place in Davenport Ward 17, and are located south-west of the Oakwood Street and St. Clair Avenue intersection on lower-tier residential roadways.

One planting is located immediately south of Oakwood Collegiate Institute where new gardens flank both sides of a driveway leading to the staff parking lot off Rosemount Avenue just west of Oakwood Street. This garden is an extension of an existing garden further west. The most predominant feature in the urban landscape at this site is at the rear of Oakwood Collegiate. Moderately-sized single detached dwellings line the south side of the street and are well maintained, most with gardens of their own.

The second planting took place to the south of the school on Springmont Avenue at the foot of a large staircase leading up from Springmount to Glenholme Avenue. This is an entirely residential area with moderately-sized single-detached homes, well maintained yard and gardens. With the exception of the houses themselves, the most predominant feature in the area is the staircase, known as the 'Springmont Steps' along side of which the plantings took place. With the exception of a single small play-area for children there are no parks in the neighbourhood.

Before these projects took place as part of the C&B City initiative, the northern site adjacent to the school had gardens extending along Rosemount Avenue from the south-west corner of Oakwood Collegiate east to Highview Crescent. There are two reasons why this previously planted garden was laid. First, to improve the visual quality of the landscape – particularly for those with houses to the south of the school and which face a small concrete retaining wall built to level Oakwood Collegiate's playing fields. Secondly, the garden exists to commemorate the historical Garrison Creek River that used to pass through the area.

The area adjacent to the Springmount Steps is devoid of vegetation with the exception of some mature trees along the side of the valley between Springmount and Glenholme Avenues. Images taken before the improvements show the east side of the concrete steps being particularly void of vegetation and colour and bringing attention to the concrete steps themselves.

On both sites the community made an effort to plant gardens that would provide some colour all year long including flowers that would bloom in the spring, summer, and fall, while also providing types of shrubbery that would remain green all winter long. The new plantings adjacent to Oakwood Collegiate involved planting of two gardens on either side of a driveway leading to the staff parking lot. Existing barrels were also replanted and restored. The gardens are triangular in shape and run about three metres along the fence-line and down the driveway on each side. A small coniferous tree and Golden Yews will provide winter colour and texture to the side of the street and help shield a rusting chain-link fence that marks the edge of the parking lot. These plantings were done in association with the Oakwood Collegiate Institute Environmental Club.

The project to the south at Springmount Steps involved the replanting of an old barrel at the foot of the stairs along with new plantings up the northern side of the staircase. Plantings include flowers, grasses, and coniferous shrubs – this was again done with the intention of providing a greater sense of beauty at all times of the year. Flowers were also planted on the south side of the staircase at the foot.

*Organization:* The Regal Heights Residents Association (RHRA) which led the project has existed since the early 1970s. For the last decade one of the main focuses of the association has been on street beautification and gardening. In July 2005 the RHRA produced a green-

spaces study entitled *Regal Heights Community Green Areas* as part of a plan indicating the importance of protecting and enhancing the limited green space in the neighbourhood. The report lists eighteen places in the neighbourhood where new efforts should be initiated and where existing efforts should be expanded. Each individual project has associated with it a priority ranking – both sites chosen were ranked as 'high priority'. The association believes that these projects received the attention of their councillor and the city in part due to their ongoing work in the neighbourhood prior to the C&B Project and their documented long-term goals.

**Goals:** The RHRA goals for this project were three-fold: to improve and protect the neighbourhood's few open green spaces; to undertake an entirely new project with the city funds rather than enhancing an existing project; and provide a good before-and-after comparison for this C&B pilot.

**Success:** The northern garden at the Collegiate Institute is modest in size and impact. However, the southern gardens at the Springmount Steps blend into their environment providing a splash of colour while obscuring and detracting from the large concrete staircase. Visual observation suggests the scale of the surrounding structures, the slope of the valley wall, and the nearby homes with their well maintained gardens, all lead to the success of the southern planting project thus blending the staircase into the surrounding urban fabric through the use of beauty.

An interviewee who was involved with the plantings indicated that he did not find the projects to be "terribly successful". This lack of success was pinned on the C&B City Neighbourhood Beautification Program's requirement for proposals indicating a quick turn around in investment – when the funds are spent a quick and noticeable result is expected: "They said we'll give you \$1500, 'tell us what you'd like to do then go ahead and spend the money and get it done'. You don't build a garden that way! A community doesn't build one that way, maybe a landscape architect might have some success but a community doesn't build one that way." Because gardens can take between five and ten years to mature a quick turn around time, this participant indicated, is an unreasonable expectation and long term garden quality may suffer as a result.

The same resident had a second concern that could impede the success of the new gardens: water. Currently C&B City funds cannot be used to fund water and irrigation systems but this resident points out that "you can't have a garden without water!" Presently the neighbourhood has to bring water from a private residence nearby to water the plantings.

Ultimately, the Resident's Association believes that these projects have had an impact on both the neighbourhood and the city's overall level of beauty. They note that there are now gardens where no gardens were before and that for those who like gardens there is a new addition to the community and therefore the community is now more beautiful. As for the city, researchers were told that the city is made up of neighbourhoods and therefore the quality of the neighbourhoods effects the quality of the city. Residents don't believe they'll be seeing tour busses in their neighbourhoods any time soon but they do think similar projects across the city can have an impact on Toronto's overall beauty if coordinated properly.

The RHRA made a conscious effort to ensure that beautification efforts would have a year-round impact on the neighbourhood. The inclusion of coniferous trees and shrubs as well as the planting of tall year-long grasses will add colour and texture during winter and will help mitigate the harsh appearance of the hard physical infrastructure (concrete staircases, chain-link fences, parking lots). An effort was also made to select different perennials that would bloom from spring to late autumn.



**Regal Heights Stair (Above), Plantings (Below), Before and After  
(City of Toronto)**

### **Finding Beauty**

The case studies documented above reveal the possibilities of beautification in the urban environment. Preliminary findings from stakeholder interviews reveal that while these projects are small in scale, because of their localized nature and the significant impact of community groups they have shifted perceptions of beauty opportunities in the neighbourhoods in which they have been realized. By far, based on survey results, the project has contributed to community building and a concurrent improvement of the quality of life in the community where the project is found. Surveys revealed issues such as 'maintenance' and 'good planning and design' to be complementary to beauty. Without forethought and follow through, the best intended projects will not succeed. Again, surveys indicate that finding beauty, provides equal opportunities for residents and visitors, with equal responsibility being shared by stakeholders (communities) and the governments elected to serve these communities. A detailed compilation of the responses to the questions posed to stakeholders is currently being analyzed.

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## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.toronto.ca/cleanandbeautiful/mayors.htm>

<sup>2</sup> [http://www.toronto.ca/committees/rt\\_beautifulcity.htm](http://www.toronto.ca/committees/rt_beautifulcity.htm)

<sup>3</sup> Approved by City Council Meeting, 30 November, 1 and 2 December 2004, see <http://www.toronto.ca/legdocs/2004/agendas/council/cc041130/pof9rpt/cl003.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.toronto.ca/cleanandbeautiful/plan.htm>

<sup>5</sup> Chodikoff, Ian (2006) "Orphaned Spaces," *Canadian Architect*, Vol.51, No.07 (July 2006), pp. 45 – 48.

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.toronto.ca/cleanandbeautiful/champions.htm#neighbourhood>

<sup>7</sup> As follows:

1. Maximum visibility & impact to the neighbourhood.
2. Simple in design and workload.
3. Organized group of volunteers to help execute and maintain the project over time.
4. Located on city-owned land (not a park) or a publicly accessible area on private property. (A privately owned exterior wall for a mural or trellis for example.) Written authorization from the property owner is required.
5. Safe access.
6. One in-kind donation (meaning contributions of volunteer services, materials, products, etc.), and one local partner or project steward or lead must be committed to the project.
7. Project should be completed within a one-year time frame.

Groups that have received funding for project(s) in a given ward in the previous two consecutive years are not eligible for funding in 2007

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.toronto.ca/cleanandbeautiful/champions.htm#neighbourhood>

<sup>9</sup> The 2005 Litter Audit showed a 20 percent improvement in 36 months. Fareed Amin, Deputy City Manager, <http://www.toronto.ca/cleanandbeautiful/report.htm>

<sup>10</sup> Schwandt, Thomas (1998) *Qualitative Inquiry: A Dictionary of Terms*, Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications, p. 221

<sup>11</sup> Stake, Robert E. "Case Studies" in Denzin Norman K. and Yvonna S. Lincoln, editors. *Handbook of Qualitative Research* (2000) Thousand Oaks, Ca: Sage, pp. 435 ff.

<sup>12</sup> Toronto City Planning, City of Toronto, Official Plan (2002) Toronto, Ontario

<sup>13</sup> Berg, B. L. (2004), *Qualitative research methods for the social sciences (5<sup>th</sup> ed.)* Boston: Pearson Education

<sup>14</sup> Berg, op. cit.

<sup>15</sup> Denzin and Lincoln, op. cit., p. 653

<sup>16</sup> Senlac Road handles very little traffic outside of peak commuting hours.

<sup>17</sup> Another goal of this new bench, its orientation, and the whole project, was to provide for a greater sense of 'eyes-on-the-street' (see Jane Jacobs).

<sup>18</sup> Note: The sunflower is the Christie Gardens symbol.

<sup>19</sup> Elyse Parker, Christian Lazier and Steven Bell.