

# RESEARCH REPORT



## eTOPIA: CMHC Design Charette Summary Report



## CMHC—HOME TO CANADIANS

Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC) has been Canada's national housing agency for more than 60 years.

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OCTOBER 13, 14 + 15, 2004

eTOPIA - THE CMHC MCLUHAN URBAN DESIGN CHARRETTE SUMMARY REPORT

UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO - ARCHITECTURE LANDSCAPE + DESIGN

CANADA MORTGAGE AND HOUSING CORPORATION

MCLUHAN INTERNATIONAL FESTIVAL OF THE FUTURE

ARCHITECTS + RESEARCH + KNOWLEDGE, INC.

# eTOPIA - CMHC DESIGN CHARETTE SUMMARY REPORT

March 18, 2005

Compiled by Mark Chilton and Guela Solow

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

From October 13th - 15th, 2004, Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC) entered into a partnership with the University of Toronto's Faculty of Architecture, Landscape and Design and the Toronto firm, Architects + Research + Knowledge Inc. (ARK Inc.), to hold a Design Charette as part of the McLuhan International Festival of the Future. The Charette challenged four teams of Urban Design students to propose interventions on four separate Toronto sites, to envision possible responses to the reality of urban densification over the coming thirty years.

eTOPIA represents the first time this diverse group of organizations has joined forces. While each brought unique individual interests and expertise to the event, it was our shared belief in the importance of urban life that resulted in the thoughtful projects and vibrant discussion that developed. Urban design issues, and interpretations and new understandings of McLuhan's ideas, brought up during the charette, informed seminar discussions in the related Urban Design elective for some time after the event. While certain organizational aspects surrounding the final panel discussion may have warranted rethinking, it is fair to say that the eTOPIA Charette was a great success.

*"While people are engaged in creating a totally different world,  
they always form vivid images of the preceding world."*

MARSHALL McLUHAN

Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation  
Urban Design Charette

Friday, October 15th 2004

Lecture Hall, Room 103

6:30 pm Reception, 7:00 pm Panel Discussion

Faculty of Architecture, Landscape and Design  
University of Toronto  
230 College Street  
Toronto, Ontario

# eTOPIA

## Rethinking the future: Urbanism and Marshall McLuhan in the Digital Age

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DOUGLAS POLLARD senior researcher, CMHC

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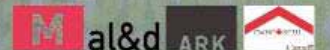
DR. VICKY SHARPE senior research fellow, CMHC

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## Résumé

Du 13 au 15 octobre 2004, la Société canadienne d'hypothèques et de logement (SCHL) s'est associée à la Faculté d'architecture, d'aménagement paysager et de conception de l'Université de Toronto et à l'entreprise torontoise Architects + Research + Knowledge Inc. (ARK Inc.), afin d'organiser une charrette de conception dans le cadre du McLuhan International Festival of the Future. La charrette mettait quatre équipes d'étudiants en esthétique urbaine au défi de proposer des interventions sur quatre terrains distincts de Toronto visant à prévoir des façons possibles de faire face à la réalité de la densification urbaine au cours des 30 prochaines années.

eTOPIA se veut un départ pour ce groupe d'organisations diversifiées qui unissaient leurs forces pour la première fois. Bien que chaque organisation apportait des intérêts et des compétences individuels uniques à cet événement, c'est notre croyance commune en l'importance de la vie urbaine qui nous a permis d'aboutir à des projets réfléchis et aux discussions animées qui ont suivi. Les problèmes d'esthétique urbaine ainsi que les interprétations et les nouvelles visions tirées des idées de McLuhan, soulevés au cours de la charrette, ont alimenté des séances de discussion collectives sur le choix en matière d'esthétique urbaine longtemps après la fin de l'événement. Alors que certains aspects organisationnels entourant la discussion finale du groupe d'experts aurait valu la peine qu'on s'y attarde davantage, il est juste de dire que la charrette eTOPIA a été un franc succès.



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**METROPOLIS MESSAGE - CMHC DESIGN CHARETTE****INTRODUCTION**

During the 30 year period from 2001-2031, the population of the Greater Golden Horseshoe will grow by almost four million people, and its economy will grow by about two million jobs. Approximately 75% of this growth is projected to occur in the Greater Toronto Area and Hamilton.\*

\* Bourne, Larry S. Social Change in the Central Ontario Region: An Issues Paper. September 2002.

To address this issue, Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC) entered into a unique partnership with the University of Toronto's Faculty of Architecture, Landscape and Design, and the well-established firm, Architects + Research + Knowledge Inc. (ARK Inc.) in Toronto, to hold an Integrated Design Charette as part of the McLuhan International Festival of the Future (Oct 8-17, 2004).

The Integrated Design Charette sought to bring together a multi-disciplinary group of interested individuals - Urban Planners, Architects, Landscape Architects, Artists - to generate ideas about how to respond to complex building and community design problems related to rapid urban growth and the need for greater levels of population density.

For this Charette, Masters Degree candidates in the post-professional Urban Design Program at the University of Toronto dealt with a range of complex challenges as they contemplated, envisioned and rethought how we might live in Toronto in the year 2031. Design work focused on four representative Toronto sites including former industrial lands, warehouse districts and urban and suburban neighbourhoods. Key challenges addressed included accommodating projected immigration and population growth, responding to the needs of an aging population and the need to minimize environmental impacts in the urban landscape through more sustainable building practices. Four teams of students, along with mentors and resources from CMHC, U of T, and ARK, Inc., explored Marshall McLuhan's writings and influence on the world of urban design and architecture throughout the process.

From the 13th to the 14th of October, the four teams created their designs using various media including computer aided design drawings and scale models at ARK, Inc.'s 82 Peter Street design studios. Results of this design brainstorming were then showcased at a panel discussion of experts held at the University of Toronto, 230 College Street, on the evening of October 15th.

The Charette was carried out over the course of three days in mid October, 2004. The event can be broken down broadly into three distinct phases: An initial media launch, held at ARK's downtown Toronto offices; a day and a half brainstorming and project production period for the design teams, and a concluding panel discussion. The schedule of events is as follows:

## SCHEDULE

Wednesday, October 13th

10:00 am - Continental Brunch for Media and Award Recipients at ARK, Inc., 82 Peter Street, 1st Floor,

11:15 am - Excellence in Education Awards Presentation with media, 82 Peter Street, 1st Floor,

11:30 am - CMHC bus tour: Media will board the bus outside 82 Peter Street for a tour of CMHC sites and discussion of charette sites,

1:00 pm - Bus tour returns to 82 Peter Street,

Thursday, October 14th

AM and PM - Charette teams work on projects at 82 Peter Street, Mentors on hand to advise and inspire,

Friday, October 15th

3:00 pm - Charette ends. Work will be moved to all day while charette members gather themselves.

4:30 pm - models and representations set up in Student Gallery, faculty of architecture, landscape and design, University of Toronto, 230 College Street, before 6pm,

6:30 pm - Reception in Student Gallery,

7:00 pm - Panel Discussion on projects and related issues, 104 Lecture Hall, faculty of architecture, landscape and design, 230 College Street,

8:30 pm - Closing remarks and thank you presentations.

## PRODUCTION REQUIREMENTS

While we were interested in giving the teams the freedom to explore their prospective sites and present their ideas and design interventions to reflect the singularity of each situation, in order to more easily compare work produced by the four charrette teams we required some formal continuity. Representation requirements were as follows:

1. Ideagram - a 24" x 36" board synthesizing the key ideas explored through the design charrette. The Ideagram could include text, diagrams, renderings, and various other forms of representation that together formed a coherent ideas collage of each team's project.
2. Each team was provided with a scaled model of their site, to which they added a modeled representation of their design proposition.

As the charrette projects were to be received by a general public that may not have shared a thorough knowledge of urban design, architecture and theory, it was encouraged that the work remain accessible to a wide audience.

## RESOURCES

There were a number of resources available to all four charrette teams. CMHC provided a library of their research covering issues such as sustainability, healthy renovations, solar power, flexible housing, innovative building case studies and residential intensification initiatives.

A number of mentors were also in attendance and moving through the teams throughout the charrette. These individuals offered expertise in areas such as sustainable architecture and development, graphic representation and Urban issues. They were available to give advice, answer questions and encourage a truly multi-disciplinary approach to the charrette.

## SUPPLIES

A package of modeling materials, graphic production resources and other supplies needed for the charrette were available to each of the teams.

In addition, each team was given money to purchase materials specific to their charrette project. Teams were encouraged to experiment with ways to best represent the ideas explored in their projects.

## CHARETTE SITES

Key to the development of each team's design Charette was the ability to carefully analyse and assess the defining qualities of the four sites. Each of the sites was chosen as an example of a specific urban condition commonly found in parts of Toronto. All of the sites constitute an alternative to the continued expansion of the city into Greenfields. As such, the sites present non-traditional approaches to residential development, encouraging people to think critically and creatively about the urban condition and the unfettered potential of each site. The charette also asked its participants to mine McLuhan's writings and ideas in responding to both site and programme.



# *the junction*

"acoustic space"



## eTOPIA

Rethinking the future: Urbanism and Marshall McLuhan in the Digital Age

# ARK

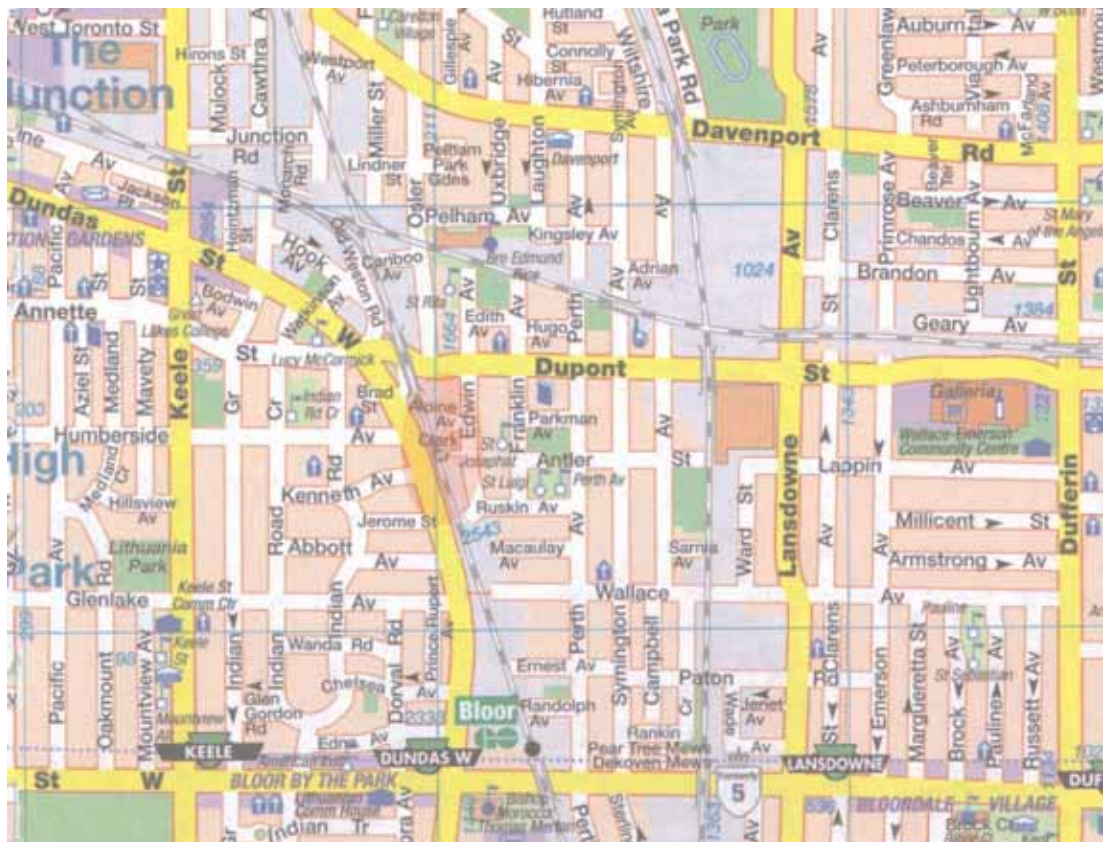
## RUSTFIELD - THE JUNCTION

The Junction site is bounded to the east by Edwin Avenue, a small residential street; to the west by a busy CN railway corridor; and to the north by Dupont Street. It forms a long, thin wedge running roughly north-south, characterized by its role as a mediating buffer between an old working class residential neighbourhood to its east and the busy commercial artery of the double railway tracks to its west. The site is presently occupied by a large three storey red brick warehouse and a smaller power plant building, separated by a small parking lot courtyard. The buildings were constructed in the 1940s and remain in use today, although the site is undoubtedly underused.

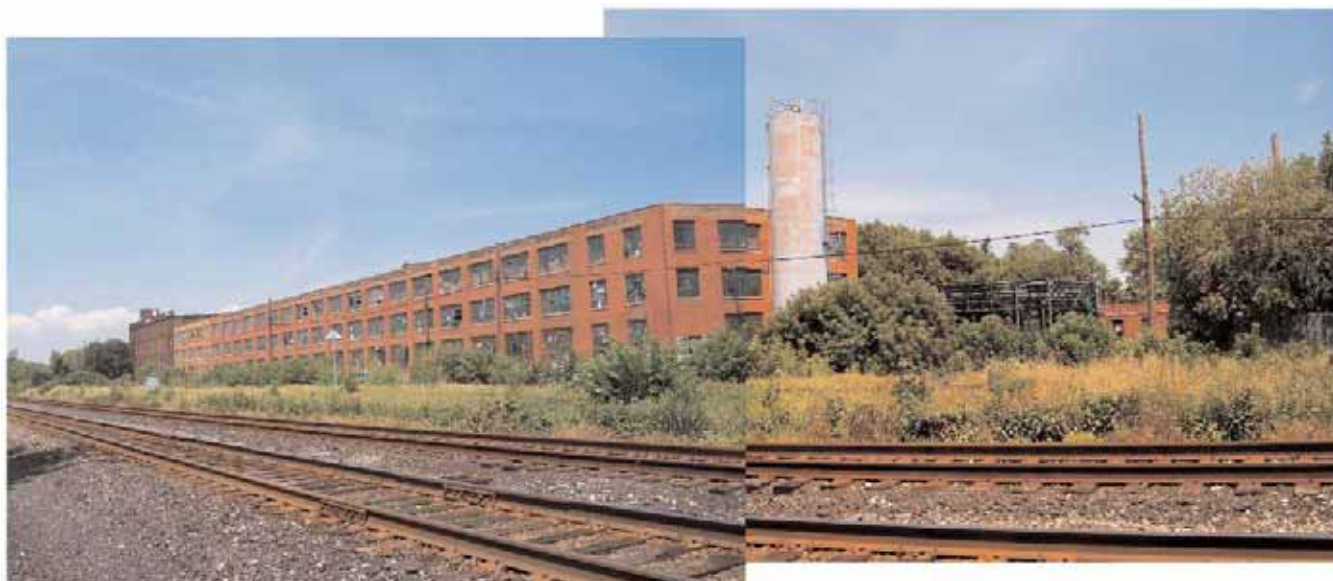
The Junction area of Toronto is defined by the convergence of three separate railway corridors, forming a triangle in the west end where local industrial production and warehousing could be plugged in to the rest of the city, the country and an even larger international network of capital production and movement.

### MOVEMENT, CHANGE, REUSE

The railway was one of the most important symbols of progress, forward movement and change in the early 20th century. Trains figure prominently in the Futurist manifesto and are bold symbols of modernism for Le Corbusier in *Towards a New Architecture*, amongst others. The Junction site makes possible the juxtaposition of a powerful but now largely defunct symbol of modernism with what may be its post-modern equivalent, the internet. Physical movement makes way for a virtual movement. The site also acts as a point of convergence between unlike building typologies - the small scale residential semi and the warehouse or factory complex. As such, it presents a further challenge of mediation and integration.







Looking northeast over the tracks



Dupont Street facade, main building

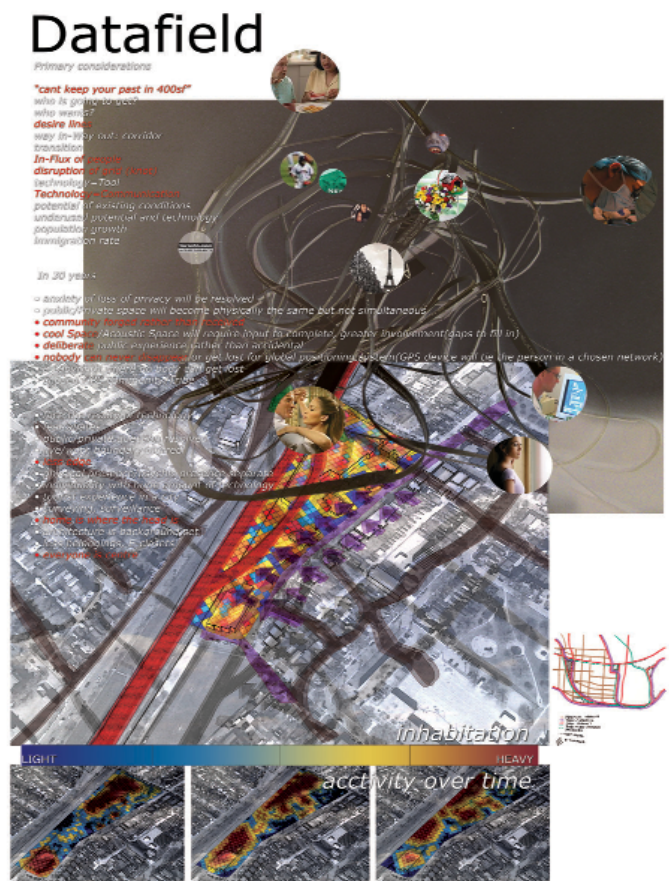
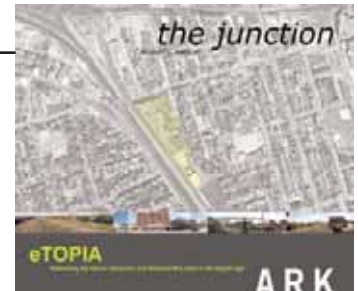


South end parking lot between buildings

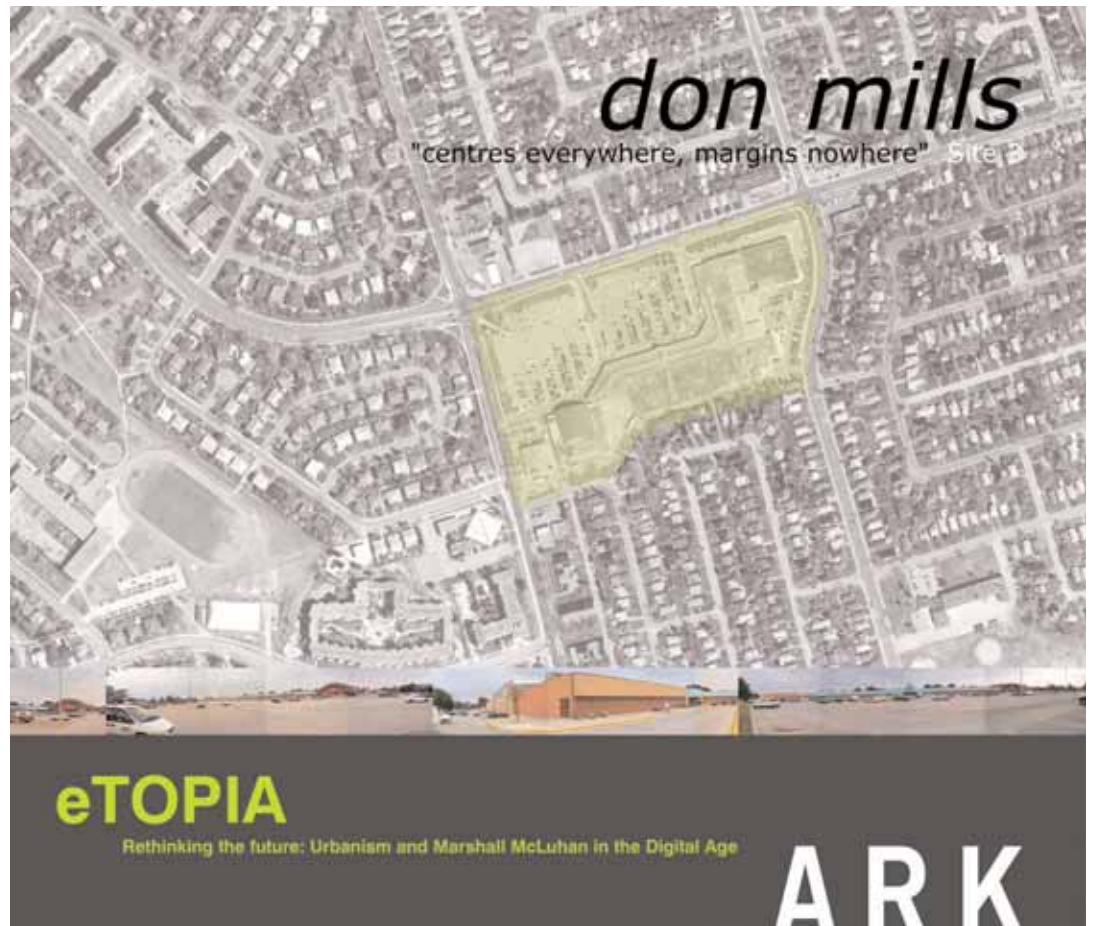
## Charette Project - The Junction

The junction team sought to address the issue of emergent technologies and their effects on urban society through the redevelopment of this under used industrial site. Key to their intervention was the assertion that in the future, people would overcome their anxiety over a loss of privacy by embracing new communications technologies. In their vision for Toronto, Public and Private space would merge. GPS and communications devices would allow one to call everywhere home, resulting in an inability to get lost or remove oneself from the urban social system. In this reality, one's address is where they are. The public/private question would be resolved by a conflation of the two, where the boundaries between living and working spaces would become fully blurred. The project asserts that by facing the reality of technology, fear of urban realities will abate.

The Junction was forged as a community by the Industrial Age's technology of the railway system. This infrastructure has deteriorated and lost much of its relevance over the years, becoming a Rustfield that speaks more to the city's past than either its present or its future. This project proposes the overlay of a new Datafield infrastructure.







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**ARK**

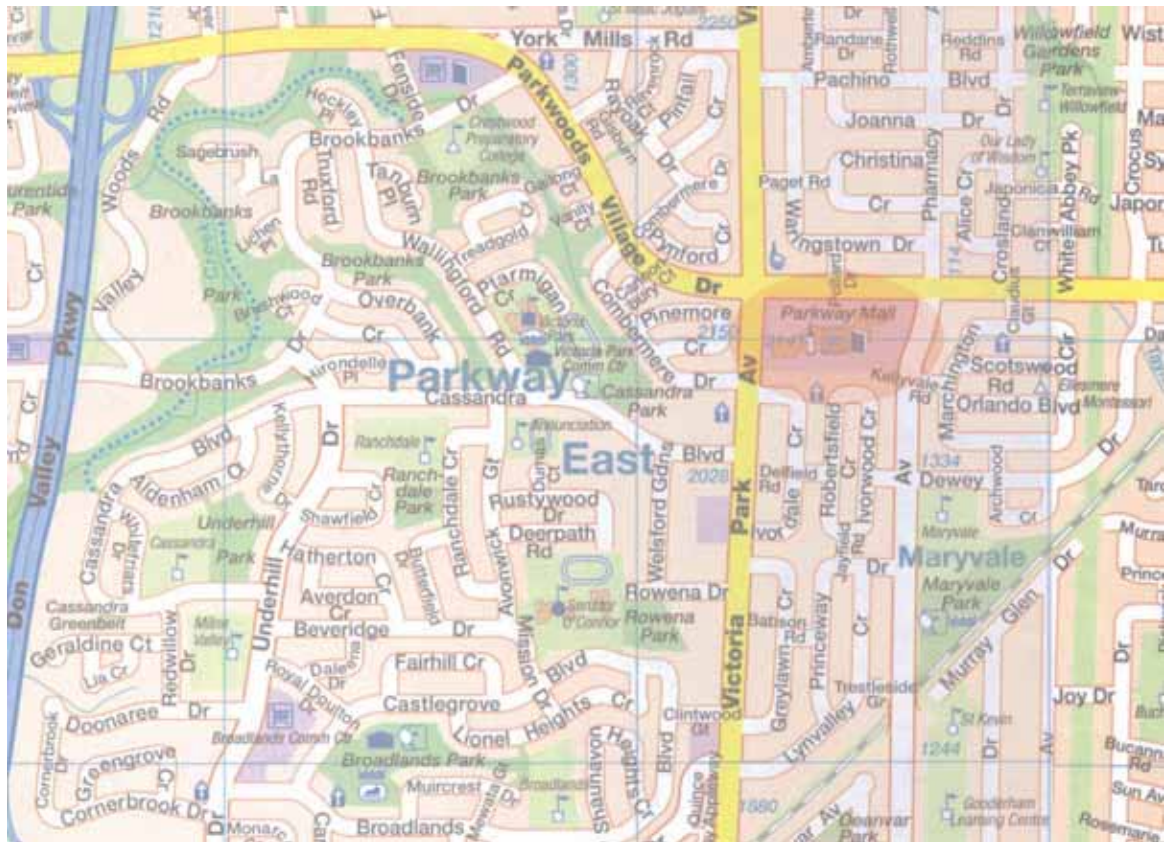
## GREYFIELD - DON MILLS

The site is a retail property on the border between Scarborough and Don Mills, in the northeast of Toronto. It is occupied by a well-established shopping centre called Parkway Mall, situated on the south east corner of Victoria Park Avenue and Ellesmere Avenue. The building occupies a majority of the property's south and east edges, with extensive surface parking filling the remainder of the site. A Dominion grocery store anchors the mall's west end, while its east end is anchored by a large vacant retail space once occupied by Biway and Zellers stores. Parkway has over eighty stores and fast food restaurants, as well as professional and medical offices. While its cultural and community services are limited to a small public library, the mall also acts as an unofficial meeting place for many of the neighbourhood's elderly.

### THE CAR, THE SUBURB REINVENTED

The Parkway Mall site is in many respects a model for greyfield redevelopment. It is an established suburban shopping centre slowly sinking into irrelevance as consumer practices change. Yet, this site is also animated by the possibilities of Evolution, Growth and Change; the challenge of repositioning a building type within its established community surroundings and reimagining the conventional relationship between retail and residential suburban spaces.

The greyfield site reveals most clearly the old, largely problematic relationship between the automobile and the city. The mall's obvious siting in relation to streets and vehicular traffic movement, and the horizontal drama of the expansive parking lot reinforce the pivotal role played by the car at this site.





Mall from northeast of site



Main parking lot from northwest of site



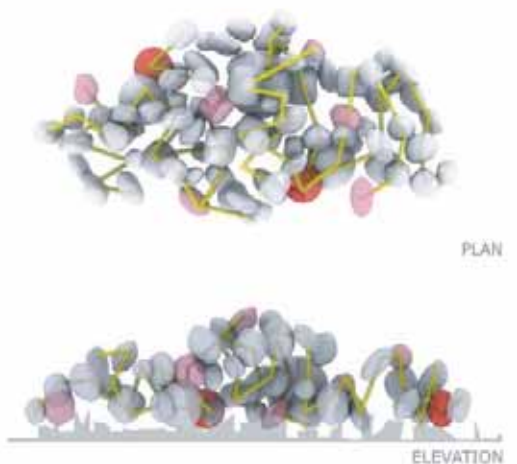
Mall interior



## Charette Project - Don Mills

The Don Mills team chose to demolish all but some foundations of Parkway Mall, the retail centre covering much of their site. Their reading of McLuhan caused them to argue that "Centres are everywhere, yet nowhere". They envisioned traditional public space becoming obsolete, replaced by E-space, which would provide function without physical form.

With an end to the need for public space as a medium for commercial or educational interaction, all physical human interaction would become purely social. Individuals would be plugged in to the world rather than living in it each day. As such, all education, shopping and work would be experienced through one's fingertips, bringing the world to you.





# *kensington market*

"the global village"



**eTOPIA**

Rethinking the future: Urbanism and Marshall McLuhan in the Digital Age

**ARK**

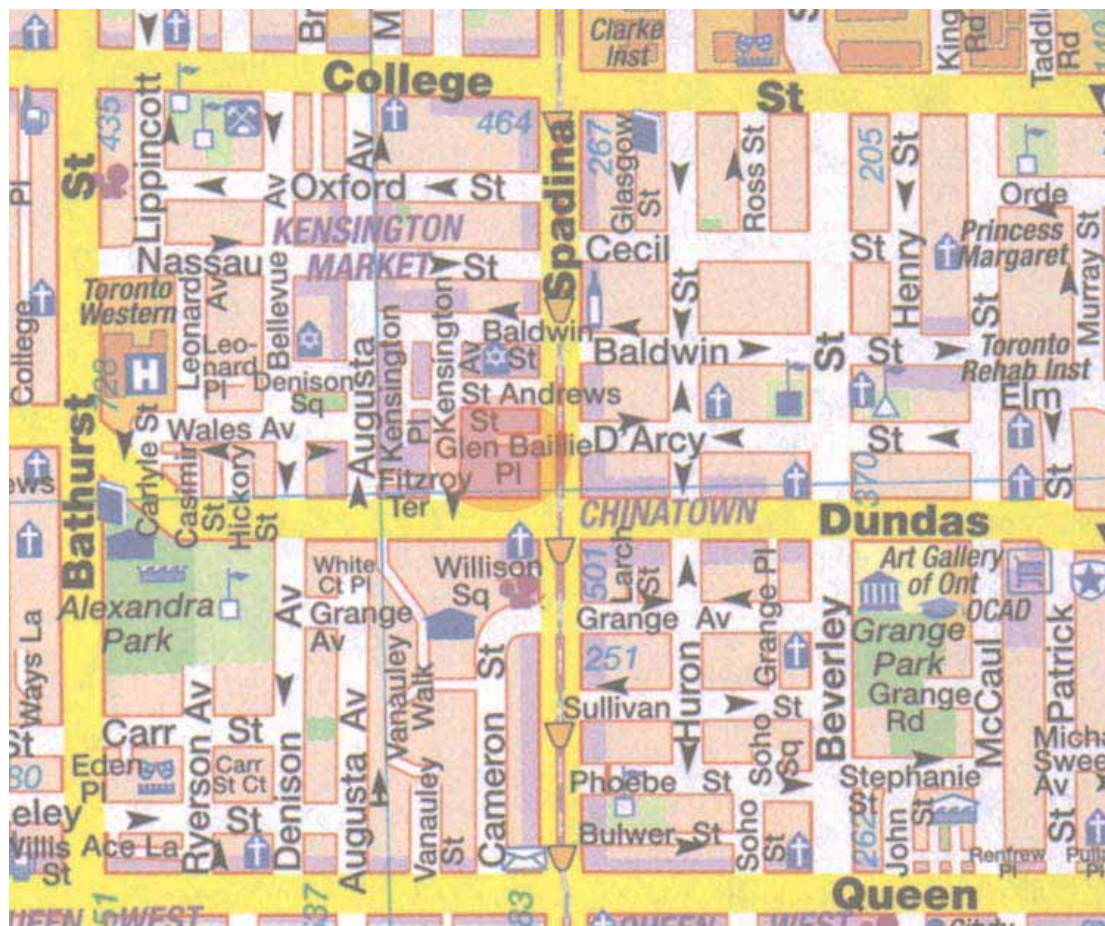
## URBANFIELD - Kensington MARKET

This site is organized around Glen Baillie Place, an inconsequential dead end lane of about sixty metres running off Spadina Avenue, just north of Dundas Street. Glen Baillie bisects the site from east to west. It is home to roughly a dozen turn-of-the-century worker's row houses and is also used as the back entrance to a series of Vietnamese restaurants along Spadina. As such, it acts as a repository for all manner of garbage and recycling and is seldom serviced by the City's cleaning and maintenance authorities.

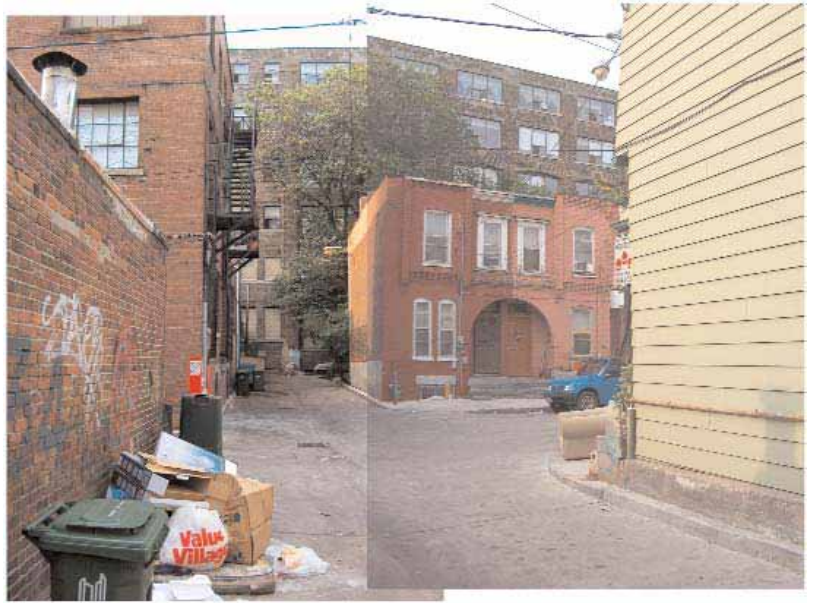
It is a well-hidden residential cul-de-sac in the centre of one of Toronto's most established, vibrant neighbourhoods. Time is slowed down on Glen Baillie, where few people venture and where the proximity of Spadina's relentless bustle gives focus to the area's juxtapositions of public and private, fast and slow, movement and stasis.

### SCALES OF HABITATION

The Glen Baillie site forms part of the fabric of an historic neighbourhood known for its history of bringing together a diverse cultural cross section of the city. If Toronto is considered the city where the globe converges, then the Kensington Market-Chinatown neighbourhood is its most visible embodiment of a "global village". This site holds the potential of small scale densification to acknowledge the forgotten spaces of the city; the spaces in between, behind and on top of buildings.







Behind Spadina Restaurants looking across Glen Bailie



Looking through to Spadina Avenue

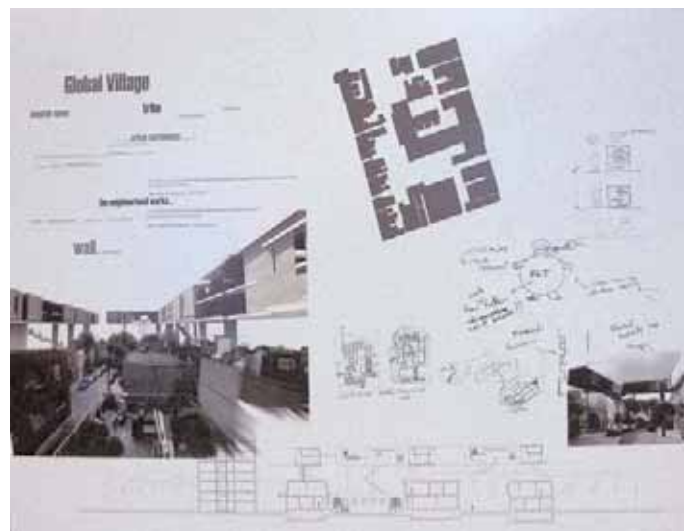
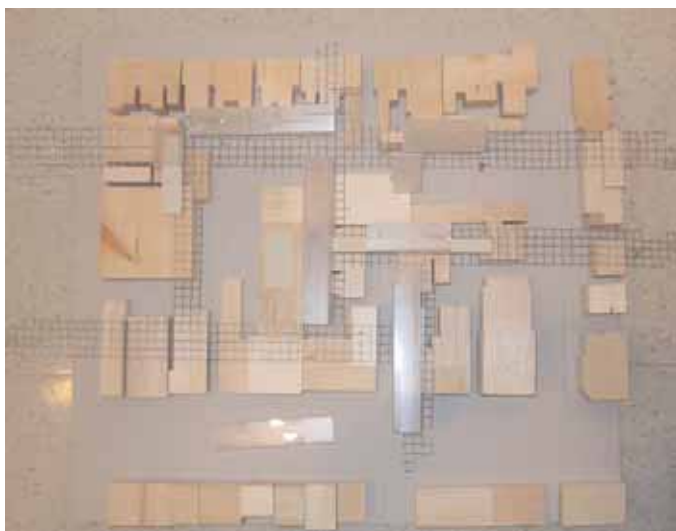


Glen Baillie Place from the West end

## Charette Project - Kensington Market

The team designing for Kensington Market were conscious of the site's unique status as a well-defined, evolved community neighbourhood. Their challenge was to introduce greater density to a neighbourhood that was far from a tabula rasa condition. The power of urban morphology within the site had withstood tides of technological change, and the collective spirit and public memory of its inhabitants had proven more sustainable than any physical intervention. Unlike other sites, the team saw Technology as having adapted to the physical form of the Market.

A response to this condition was to leave Kensington's existing buildings and infrastructure virtually untouched, choosing instead to suspend a second layer of building on pylons above the existing neighbourhood. This approach maintains the Market's human scale and maze-like quality, and reinforces the pedestrian-friendly emphasis of the area while addressing the issue of urban densification.





# *the docklands*

"the medium is the message"

Site 1



## eTOPIA

Rethinking the future: Urbanism and Marshall McLuhan in the Digital Age

# ARK



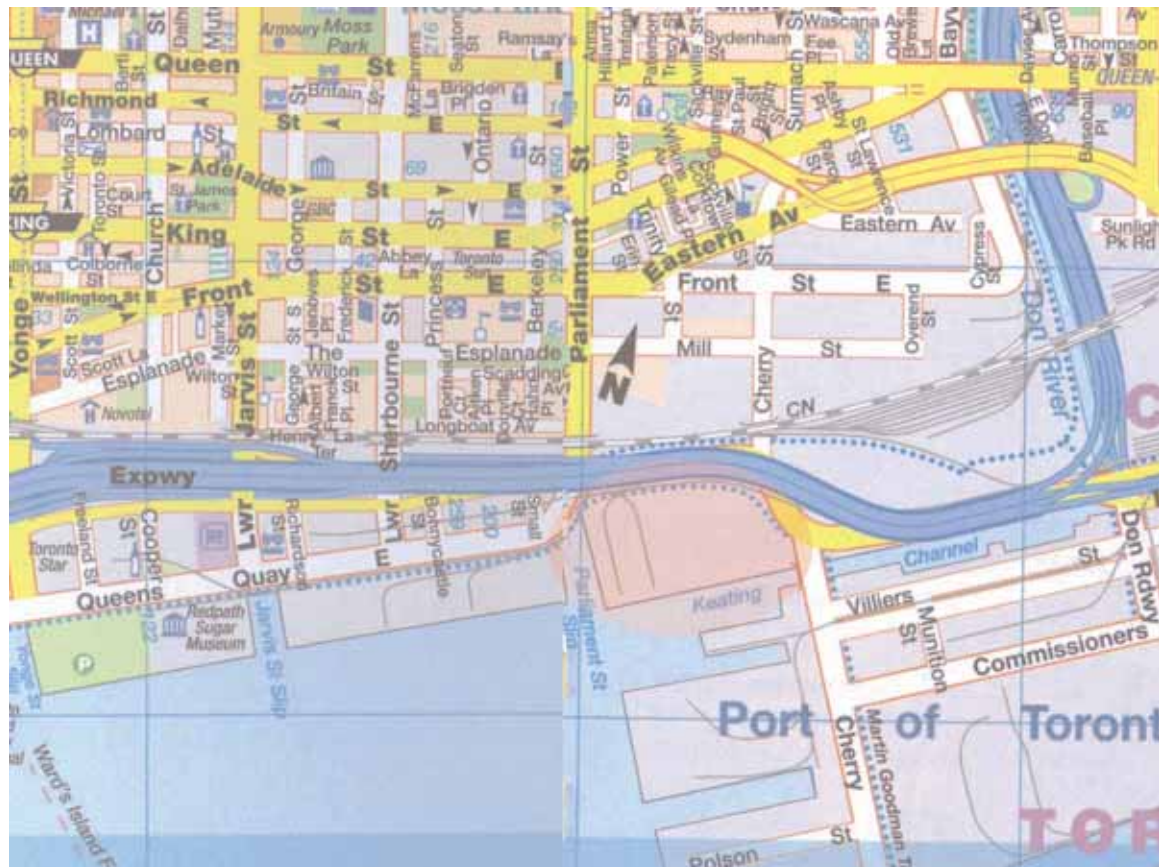
## BROWNFIELD - THE DOCKLANDS

The site is bounded to the east by Cherry Street; to the south by the Keating Channel (joining the Don River with the Lake); to the west by the Parliament Street Slip; and to the north by the Gardiner Expressway. This section of the waterfront has a long history of inhabitation. It is part of an extensive strip of land reclaimed from Lake Ontario over the course of the 19th century, and subsequently used for warehousing to support Toronto's shipping industry.

In its present state it sits as a barren industrial wasteland, graveled over and fenced in by its present owner, the Home Depot. All buildings, save for a medium sized grain elevator on the west side of the property, have been razed, leaving a parcel of land with little indication of its history. Most recently, it may be best known to Torontonians as the former site of Tent City, a community settlement of homeless people that has received much press.

### LAYERS

This Brownfield site in the Docklands is remarkable for its many layers of extended occupation. The defining characteristic of a brownfield is its status as a site with a history of human activity. In the case of our chosen site, it is a history rich in both industrial and marine activity; and the social issue of poverty, with its allied concerns over the mediation of public and private space, and society's responsibility to its citizens. While today the site stands empty, it remains anything but a tabula rasa condition. Layers of meaning are inextricably embedded in the land upon which the charette response will be built.







Looking south from under the Gardiner Expressway



Railway tracks and grain elevator from the east



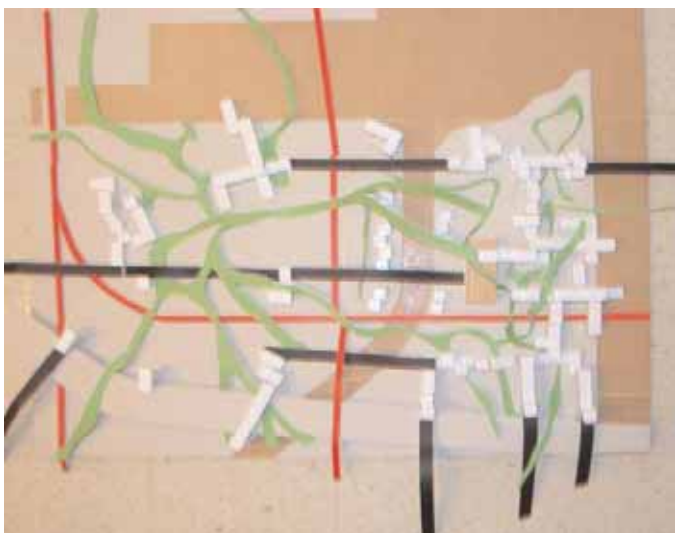
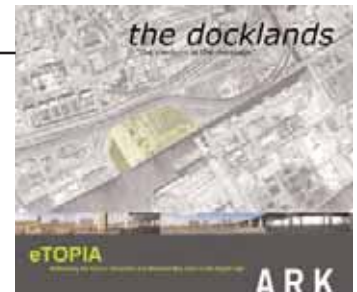
Towards the City over Cherry Street

## Charette Project - The Docklands

The intervention in the Docklands was motivated primarily by an analysis of the site itself. Most evident to the charette team exploring this site was its remarkable separation from the surrounding city. The team sought to plug the site back into a larger urban framework, recognising both the importance of connectivity through physical infrastructure and a need to reinvest the site with human interaction. To this end, they used a weaving analogy to bring public transportation systems through the site. A series of canals were cut through the site, integrating it more fully with its southern boundary and acknowledging its historical role as part of Toronto's harbourfront.

The concept of adaptability is also important to the proposition. The docklands has undergone a number of transformations over the years. The urban fabric's ability to adapt to new uses and technological innovations allows it to be continuously relevant to society.

Finally, the layered memories of the site - from pre-industrial marshlands to busy port to homeless community - was recognised as an important characteristic of the site, contributing further to the use of weaving and layering as design strategies for the charette.





## Charette Process - Critique



## Charette Process - Production





Charette Process - Panel Discussion



**CHARETTE TEAMS****A. RUSTFIELD - THE JUNCTION**

- Students:
1. Shahrzad Davondi
  2. Xinxin Li
  3. Laula Farzana
  4. Young Architect - Tymeia Sarkozy
  5. Artist - James Carl
  6. CMHC - Luis Rodriguez

**B. GREYFIELD - DON MILLS**

- Students:
1. Christian Huggett
  2. Globou Saravandi-Rad
  3. Lu Sun
  4. Young Architect - Vered Gindi (ARK, Inc.)
  5. Artist - Derek Sullivan
  6. CMHC - Karen Gregory

**C. URBANFIELD - KENSINGTON MARKET**

- Students:
1. Nima Javidi
  2. Aleksandra Janus
  3. Nasim Adab
  4. Amy Roots
  5. Young Architect - Karen Zwart-Hielema (Stantec Architecture, Ltd.)
  6. Artist - Emily Hogg
  7. CMHC - Sandra Marshall



#### D. BROWNFIELD - THE DOCKLANDS

- Students:
1. Drazia Begum
  2. Bruce Qingmin Han
  3. Pradeep Kapoor
  4. Aaron Cheng
5. Young Architect - Mark Chilton (ARK, Inc.)
6. CMHC - Doug Pollard

The charette teams were supported by a number of mentors with various related expertise from the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation and the architecture firm, ARK, Inc. These mentors were be on hand during the charette to advise teams in their design development, to encourage a truly interdisciplinary approach to the projects, to act as technical support and to help answer particular questions as they came up.

## PARTICIPANTS

### MENTORS

Luis Rodriguez	CMHC, Senior Researcher specialising in Geriatric housing issues,
Karen A. Gregory	CMHC, Senior Research Consultant focusing on sustainable community planning,
Sandra Marshall	CMHC, Senior Researcher specialising in multi-unit residential building design,
Douglas Pollard	CMHC, specialising in sustainable building and community design issues,
Yusef Fasier	ARK, Inc. specialist in graphic representation and computer design applications,
Chris Glebe	ARK, Inc. specialist in graphic representation and computer design applications,

### CHARETTE TEAM LEADERS

Karen Zwart-Hielema	Stantec Architects
Vered Gindi	Architects + Research + Knowledge, Inc.
Tymea Sarkozy	

### ARTISTS

James Carl  
Derek Sullivan  
Emily Hogg

### CANADA MORTGAGE AND HOUSING CORPORATION

Mark Salerno	District Manager (GTA)
Patricia Christmas	Communications and Marketing Consultant

### ARCHITECTS + RESEARCH + KNOWLEDGE, INC. (ARK)

Guela Solow	Partner
Mark Chilton	Intern Architect

### FACULTY OF ARCHITECTURE, LANDSCAPE & DESIGN, UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO

Robert Levit	Director, Master of Urban Design Program
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### PANELISTS

Robert Levit	Director, Master of Urban Design Program, al&d
Luis Rodriguez	Senior Researcher, CMHC
George Baird	Dean, al&d
Charles Waldheim	Director, Masters of Landscape Architecture, al&d
Vickey Sharpe	CEO, Sustainable Development Technology Canada
Andrew Payne	Director, BA Architectural Studies Program, U of T
Christopher Hume	Architecture Critic, Toronto Star
Douglas Pollard	Senior Researcher, CMHC

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

The following is an abridged bibliography for the charette. While not all of these publications were on hand as a part of the charette library, the bibliography was provided to charette team members to encourage an interdisciplinary approach to the project.

### Urban Intensification

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