Executive Summary:

Design Your Main Street Study

The Junction Residents Association Area
Toronto, Canada
2023

Junction Residents Association

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The 'Design Your Main Street' study, conducted within The Junction Residents Association's catchment area in Toronto, Canada, is an exploratory locally-initiated study including an anonymous survey, observational work, and canvassing. The survey questions function to encourage the Junction residents and business owners to provide their perspectives and concerns about the main street's features (Dundas Street West) and overall neighborhood features, with implicit references to municipal public policy objectives. The goal of the culminating summary report is to function as a point-of-reference and community tool in capturing community aspirations for neighbourhood change and development(s). This two-month (June to July) 2023 study was initiated by the Junction Residents Association (JRA) and developed by two researchers who were hired with funding from Canada Summer Jobs and donations from sponsors and local residents. The JRA is a volunteer and locally-run nonprofit located in the Junction. The JRA believe that as development and changes occur within the Junction, the locals' lived experiences and perspectives need to be accounted for accordingly. The overall purpose of the outcomes of this study is to bolster community feedback so that it has the potential to "inform the building of public spaces and infrastructure to meet the needs of the community and businesses in the Junction neighbourhood". Furthermore, the motivation to locally fund this study was due to a lack of a City of Toronto budget to initiate a formal main street or 'avenue' study.

The two research questions guiding this study were:

1. What are the perspectives and concerns of The Junction area residents and business owners regarding the development, qualities and characteristics of the main street (Dundas Street West)?
2. How can these perspectives and concerns effectively inform the evolution and development of the main street and the neighbourhood?

The inclusion criteria questions were formatted at the beginning of the survey and were mandatory for participation.[1]

A variety of literature guided the development and results analyses of this study. This background literature was divided into two main subcategories: main street studies and scholarly studies and measures, alongside the local JRA and BIA work, and background City of Toronto policy and development documents. This was done to emphasize the key points and measures from each set of studies so that readers can understand the unique significance of the DYMS findings as detailed in the 'results summary' section of the report. The main street studies were included in the report to help contextualize the importance of and assumptions surrounding the concept of a

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[1] Inclusion criteria: participants had to confirm that they were 18+ years of age at the time of data collection, and a resident and/or business owner in the JRA's catchment area, or bordering onto this catchment area

'main street'. This subcategory included studies that investigate the significance of main streets, globally, based on perceptions, theory and assumptions. The scholarly works and measures functioned to bolster this study's importance in the realm of professional local planning and development. This subcategory included an overview of peer-reviewed studies that define and assess a variety of measures of residential satisfaction, neighbourhood satisfaction and neighbourhood contentment theories. Furthermore, this subcategory also included an overview of relevant policy work and Toronto or Canadian-based surveys and studies. For example, studies exploring the significance of 'well-being' and its associations with livability and neighbourhood planning, including the rankings of satisfaction and contentment, helped frame the importance of the DYMS (Gianfredi et al., 2021; OECD, n.d.; Okulicz-Kozaryn, 2013; StatsCan, n.d.; UWaterloo, 2014).

The observational work, canvassing and online survey response collection were staggered throughout the two month period, with some overlap, so that each component made unique contributions to the data analyses. Observations were conducted along Dundas Street West at various intersections between Keele and Jane Streets, with inspiration drawn from the Junction Gardens BIA's 2014 Streetscape Master Plan Vision.[2] These observations were conducted by both researchers on various days and times of the week in June. Observational work was integral to this study, as witnessing and documenting experiences in the built environment contribute greatly to a multifaceted study of neighbourhood satisfaction and main street character. These observations were conducted with an open-mind and were specifically attuned to local infrastructure, transportation, environment, activity, and relatively unique area qualities. Canvassing was conducted along the main street, as businesses were visited to encourage the participation of business owners in the survey, as well as in residential areas. The researchers also recruited at neighbourhood events. Residential streets were selected utilizing a randomization function in Google Sheets to create a random sample of houses to visit. The online survey for response collection was created on Google Forms, and data was compiled into a Google Sheet. The survey variables were divided into themes based on the literature: infrastructure–including accessibility and housing, community–including heritage and greenery, economy, and socialization, with demographic questions concluding the survey. Data was summarized using descriptive statistics, including with the charts from the Google Form results summary. Data was analyzed through thematic coding and with reference to the literature and theories. The 'Results Summary' portion of the report contains answers to the first research question, and the second research question was answered in a following separate section (section #5 in the report's table of contents). Section #5 and the 'Ways Forward' section essentially discuss how these findings can be put into conversation with each other for a

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[2] See: https://torontojunction.ca/2014-streetscape-master-plan

variety of development-related and community-building purposes, by understanding differences and similarities, and bridging gaps.

A total of 315 individuals who met the inclusion criteria participated in the survey. As stated in the report, generally, the community responded in the survey that they valued green spaces, accessibility, bike lanes, community gathering areas, cleanliness and seating, and that they would like to see less traffic and more traffic calming measures in the neighbourhood. For example, 70% of participants were in favour of encouraging cycling on the main street, as there currently are no bike lanes and little bicycle parking. Furthermore, 40% of participants stated that the main street is an accessible space for cyclists only to 'a small extent', and 27% stated 'not at all'. In comparison, 46% stated that the main street is an accessible space for pedestrians to 'a large extent', and over half of participants choose to walk the main street. In terms of housing, only around 47% of participants are 'mostly satisfied' with the quality of housing in the Junction. Over half of participants see the Junction area as only 'somewhat' affordable to live within. The top two types of housing favoured in the neighbourhood, as ranked, are fully detached and semi-detached homes. Fortunately, the vast majority of participants see the Junction as welcoming and family-friendly. Over half (62%) of participants feel safe in the Junction 'most of the time'. Suggested improvements for safety included: enhanced lighting, less and enhanced control of traffic, and creating supportive community resources. In terms of heritage, around 45% are familiar with the Junction's heritage/history to 'a moderate extent', and around the same percentage see this heritage/history reflected on the main street to 'a small extent'. The vast majority (79%) stated that they want to see more artwork on the main street, with many in favour of murals, sculptures, and local art.

Many participants are divided in terms of positive, neutral and negative perspectives about the quality and amount of greenery on and around the main street. Many want to see more care for the health and expansion of flowers, trees and gardens. Many also enjoy the social nature of patios and benches, Malta Park and the parkette between St. John's Place and Clendenan St, including more community-welcoming spaces and activities. Almost 48% and 49% of participants are 'mostly satisfied' with the cleanliness of the main street and neighbourhood green spaces, respectively. Almost 45% see the main street as encouraging leisure activities to 'a moderate extent', but many are also split between perceiving encouragement to 'a small extent' and 'a large extent', 75 and 77 (24% and 24.6%) participants respectively. Around 61% are 'mostly satisfied' with the economic activity on the main street, and the vast majority see the main street as impactful on the economic success of the neighbourhood. The five top priorities for infrastructural improvements, based on those most stated, are: cleanliness, greenery, accessibility (extending to transit, pedestrians and cyclists), streetscapes/street furniture, and heritage (conservation, enhancements, etc.). These are in line with much of the notable experiences also documented during observation.

Many see the area of Dundas, west of Clendenan as in need of more attention. This was also notable in the observational work. Many participants have indicated various unique types of community events and activities they are interested in seeing, such as music, food and arts festivals, and many have also participated and/or do currently participate in community activities and events. There are several instances in which participants mentioned reminiscing about discontinued events. In terms of barriers to economic activity on Dundas, high rents, empty storefronts, parking, traffic and accessibility, including inconsistent store hours and early closures, and a lack of variety in business types were noted. Empty storefronts, traffic and accessibility were also noteworthy observations by the researchers as potential barriers in the community, as well. The types of businesses people want to see more of are listed in the report. There are also a series of word clouds to illustrate some feedback within the report.

Lastly, there are a series of recommendations or ways forward listed below regarding future potentials and the usage of the report/executive summary:

- Consultations with entrepreneurs, developers, politicians, policy makers and planners, including locals and community associations to develop ideas and plans for neighbourhood improvement and maintenance based on community priorities, features and geography
- Usage and comparative analyses to be done in tandem with the City of Toronto Heritage Conservation District study in the Junction, which is in phase one currently[3]
- Enhancing active knowledge sharing between and outside of local organizations to reach the public – facilitating greater engagement and education in the process of reinforcing knowledge sharing
- Developing effective resource-building and resource-sharing strategies at the municipal and neighbourhood level
- Placing a variety of key considerations at the forefront that are premised on the findings of empirical work and the documented community feedback, as detailed in this report and executive summary

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[3] See:
https://www.toronto.ca/city-government/planning-development/heritage-preservation/heritage-conservation-districts-planning-studies/

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