

Parkdale People's Palace

Rethinking a Heritage Church as Revitalized Social Infrastructure

by
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Author's Declaration

I hereby declare that I am the sole author of this thesis. This is a true copy of the thesis, including any required final revisions, as accepted by my examiners.

I understand that my thesis may be made electronically available to the public.

Abstract

In recent decades, Canada's church buildings have been steadily declining in number and use due to the increasing secularization of society and the diminished role of Christianity in the country. Rather than demolishing the buildings, methods of adaptation and/or intensification of usage can prolong the buildings of heritage value; however, their revitalization is often impeded by the constraints of heritage and the need for sustainable financial investment, delaying opportunities for creating socially beneficial spaces for the community. Considering the history of Toronto's church buildings as community-oriented places and the growing demands for an abundance of social infrastructure, this thesis asks: how can a church building in disrepair become more socially relevant to its community through architectural adaptation?

South Parkdale is a neighbourhood demonstrating a commitment to social equity in the face of dramatic gentrification forces. Neighbourhood understanding is developed through mapping, photography, and community reports, which reveal degrees of social tension and priorities and provide a basis for surrounding church buildings to work both for and within a robust community-oriented agenda. Bonar-Parkdale Presbyterian Church is selected for its signs of disrepair and intent for revitalization and is explored through photography and drawing. Inspired by key community directions and community-oriented design precedents, this thesis builds on the community's existing needs to suggest Bonar-Parkdale Presbyterian Church's transformation into a community food hub. The design proposal introduces new spaces and programming for public connectivity and integration of the many members of community, thus suggesting greater communal usage and renewed social relevance. In its entirety, this thesis argues for an intersection of heritage and social infrastructure empowered by community ideals in order to present socially constructive futures among Toronto's declining church buildings.

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Table of Contents

iii	Author's Declaration
v	Abstract
vi	Acknowledgements
xi	List of Figures
xxv	List of Abbreviations
	<u>Introduction</u>
1	Position
	<u>Toronto</u>
23	“A City of Churches”
33	Patterns of Changing Church Buildings
43	Towards Social Infrastructure
	<u>South Parkdale</u>
53	Tensions of Breaking and Building
73	South Parkdale's Social Infrastructure
	<u>Bonar-Parkdale Presbyterian Church</u>
87	A Building Can Be a Double-Edged Sword
129	Approaching Adaptation
	<u>Design Proposal</u>
139	Building a New Framework
	<u>Conclusion</u>
189	Reflections
194	Bibliography

List of Figures

Introduction

- 1 **Fig. 1.1** Parliament St. Methodist (United) Church during demolition circa 1952.
Photo from retrieved public domain, courtesy of Toronto Public Library. <https://digitalarchive.tpl.ca/objects/352659/parliament-st-methodist-united-church-parliament-st-so?ctx=e9146f6d3f914019eac3773a6c1bd77e38e191ac&idx=1>
- 2 **Fig. 1.2** Canada's religious composition from 1991-2021.
Chart by author, data retrieved from Statistics Canada, *2001 Census: analysis series, Religions in Canada*, [Catalogue no. 96F0030XIE2001015], Ottawa, ON, 2003, accessed June 11, 2023. https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/access_acces/archive.action-eng.cfm?english/census01/Products/Analytic/companion/rel/pdf/96F0030XIE2001015.pdf; Statistics Canada, *Canada (Code 01) - 2011 National Household Survey (NHS) Profile Table* [Catalogue no. 99-004-XWE], Ottawa, ON, 2013, accessed June 11, 2023. <http://www12.statcan.gc.ca/nhs-enm/2011/dp-pd/prof/index.cfm?Lang=E>; and Statistics Canada, *2021 Census of Population – Canada Census Profile Table* [Catalogue no. 98-316-X2021001], Ottawa, ON, 2023, accessed June 11, 2023. <https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2021/dp-pd/prof/index.cfm?Lang=E>;
- 4 **Fig. 1.3** Revised Shearing Layers of Change diagram.
Adapted from David Fannon, Michelle Laboy, and Peter Wiederspahn, *The Architecture of Persistence: Designing for Future Use* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2022), 19.
- 6 **Fig. 1.4** Interior damage and possible structural damage caused by a roof leak visible in Bonar-Parkdale Presbyterian Church (BPPC).
Photo by author.

- 8 **Fig. 1.5** The proliferation and eventual decline of churches in Toronto.

Collage by author. Images used are from public domain, courtesy of Toronto Public Library, and from Jon Caulfield, “The Growth of the Industrial City and Inner Toronto’s Vanished Church Buildings,” *Urban History Review = Revue d’Histoire Urbaine* 23, no. 2 (1995): 7, <http://search.proquest.com.proxy.lib.uwaterloo.ca/scholarly-journals/growth-industrial-city-inner-torontos-vanished/docview/1300091447/se-2?accountid=14906>.

- 10 **Fig. 1.6** The timeframe between a building’s existence and its protected preservation has tapered over time.

Diagram courtesy of OMA, <https://www.arch.columbia.edu/books/reader/6-preservation-is-overtaking-us#reader-anchor-0>. Originally sourced from G.J. Ashworth, *European Heritage Planning and Management*, Exeter: Intellect Books, 1999.

- 12 **Fig. 1.7** A derelict church in England found new community purpose by providing new programs and revitalized spaces.

Photo by Richard Chivers, <https://www.ribaj.com/buildings/macewen-commended-2022-st-margarets-church-portsmouth-studio-bad>

- 14 **Fig. 1.8** The church adaptation of Folkehuset Absalon maintains key architectural features and a robust social mission.

Photo by Helene Høyer Mikkelsen, <https://www.troldtekt.com/references/culture/absalon/>

- 16 **Fig. 1.9** How can a church building adapt to gain a revitalized community significance?

Drawing by author.

- 19 **Fig. 1.10** The thesis proceeds from a large-scale understanding of issues towards smaller ones that eventually lead to a design proposal.

Drawing by author.

Toronto

- 23 **Fig. 2.1** Looking towards the West 40 Lofts (formerly St. Mary the Virgin Anglican Church) in the background.

Photo by author.

- 24 **Fig. 2.2** Map of Christian churches and all other places of worship in Toronto as of 2006.

Data sourced from the City of Toronto Open Data Portal. <https://open.toronto.ca/dataset/places-of-worship/>

- 26 **Fig. 2.3** Various Toronto churches around 1890.

Image from public domain, courtesy of Toronto Public Library. Retrieved from: <https://digitalarchive.tpl.ca/objects/353053/torontochurches>

- 26 **Fig. 2.4** A map from 1967 showing Toronto's annexation of adjacent lands from the inner city.
Retrieved from A. Douglas Ford, *City of Toronto*, "City of Toronto Archives," 1967, accessed May 6, 2023. https://www.toronto.ca/ext/archives/s0727/s0727_it0122.jpg
- 28 **Fig. 2.5** Interior of former Bathurst Street Methodist Church, now known as the Randolph Theatre, in 2013.
Photo by Jessica Mace. Retrieved from "Redundant since Construction: The Fate of Two Late-Nineteenth-Century Churches in Toronto," in *Le Devenir Des Églises: Patrimonialisation Ou Disparition*, eds. Thomas Coomans and Jean-Sébastien Sauvé (Québec: Presses de l'Université du Québec, 2014), 127.
- 31 **Fig. 2.6** Historic 83-year-old Wychwood church scheduled for demolition.
155 Wychwood Ave. Google Maps, Sep 2020, Streetview. Accessed October 14, 2021, <https://goo.gl/maps/iGzWxiCawxdM8Qkt8>
- 32 **Fig. 2.7** Interior of the West40 lofts.
Photo by Lauren Miller Photography. Retrieved from: <https://www.blogto.com/real-estate-toronto/2021/03/2m-40-westmoreland-ave-toronto-church-loft/>
- 34 **Fig. 2.8** Exterior of All Saints Church-Community Centre captured in February 2022.
Photo by author.
- 34 **Fig. 2.9** Interior of All Saints Church-Community Centre during an annual holiday luncheon.
Photo posted by All Saints Church Community Centre. Retrieved from: <https://www.facebook.com/AllSaintsTO/photos/pb.100067809377897.-2207520000./1184860678229519/?type=3>
- 36 **Fig. 2.10** All-Saints Church-Community Centre in typical usage.
Drawing by author.
- 38 **Fig. 2.11** Exterior rendering of the proposed redevelopment at Saint Luke's United Church.
Image by KPMB Architects/Kindred Works/Handout. Retrieved from: <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/canada/article-united-church-to-transform-its-properties/>
- 40 **Fig. 2.12** Exterior rendering of proposed mixed-use redevelopment at Bloor Street United Church.
Retrieved from KPMB Architects: <https://www.kpmb.com/project/bloor-street-united-church-cielo-condos/>
- 41 **Fig. 2.13** Bloor Street United Church being partially demolished for mixed-use redevelopment.
Photo by UtakataNoAnnex. <https://urbantoronto.ca/database/projects/cielo-condos.29486>

- 42 **Fig. 2.14** Images of an interior rendering and ground floor plan of the proposed redevelopment at Saint Luke's United Church.
Photo by Yader Guzman. Retrieved from: <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/canada/article-united-church-to-transform-its-properties/>
- 44 **Fig. 2.15** Cover of *Valuing Social Infrastructure* report by Community Links' Early Action Task Force.
Retrieved from Caroline Slocock, *Valuing Social Infrastructure* (London, UK: Community Links, 2018), 1, <http://www.civilexchange.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/Valuing-Social-Infrastructure-final.pdf>.
- 44 **Fig. 2.16** Cover of *Townscapes: The Value of Social Infrastructure* report by the Bennett Institute for Public Policy.
Retrieved from Tom Kelsey and Michael Kenny, *Townscapes: The Value of Social Infrastructure* (Cambridge, UK: Bennett Institute for Public Policy, May 2021), 1, https://www.bennettinstitute.cam.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/Townscapes_The_value_of_infrastructure.pdf.
- 45 **Fig. 2.17** Cover of *Space for Community: Strengthening our Social Infrastructure* report by The British Academy and Power to Change.
Retrieved from The British Academy, Power to Change, *Space for Community: Strengthening our Social Infrastructure* (London, UK, January 2023), 1, https://www.thebritishacademy.ac.uk/documents/4536/Space_for_community_strengthening_our_social_infrastructure_vSUYmgW.pdf.
- 46 **Fig. 2.18** St. John's Presbyterian Church in Riverdale, which currently stands in a state of disrepair.
Photo by author.
- 49 **Fig. 2.19** Places of worship and Neighbourhood Improvement Areas (NIAs) within the Toronto and East York Community Council Boundary, with neighbourhood of study highlighted.
Map by author, data sourced from Toronto Open Data (<https://open.toronto.ca/dataset/community-council-boundaries/>; <https://open.toronto.ca/dataset/toronto-centreline-tcl/>; <https://open.toronto.ca/dataset/neighbourhoods/> (historic 140); <https://open.toronto.ca/dataset/neighbourhood-improvement-areas/>; <https://open.toronto.ca/dataset/places-of-worship/>)

South Parkdale

- 53 **Fig. 3.1** Looking into H.O.P.E. Community Garden next to Masaryk-Cowan Communiy Centre with BPPC in the background.
Photo by author.

- 54 **Fig. 3.2** South Parkdale is more heavily burdened with precarious individuals than North Parkdale is.
From Parkdale People’s Economy, *Parkdale Community Benefits Framework* (Toronto, ON: Parkdale Community Economic Development Planning Project, 2018), 13, <https://parkdalecommunityeconomies.files.wordpress.com/2018/11/parkdale-community-benefits-framework1.pdf>.
- 57 **Fig. 3.3** A residential fence at the intersection of O’Hara Ave and Maple Grove Ave in North Parkdale is tagged with mixed sentiments about Parkdale and/or its people. One obvious message reads “Parkdale is HOME.”
Photo by author.
- 58 **Fig. 3.4** At the corner of Queen St W and Gwynne Ave., the entry door of a Middle Eastern restaurant door is shattered. The presence of a police vehicle suggests that the incident was recent.
Photo by author.
- 59 **Fig. 3.5** The windows to the Kabayan Multicultural Centre are barred.
Photo by author.
- 59 **Fig. 3.6** A sleeping bag rests on a Toronto post-and-ring bike rack. Doors exiting from the Masaryk Cowan Community Centre are similarly barred.
Photo by author.
- 60 **Fig. 3.7** A handwritten message on Noble St in North Parkdale prompts us to think about our relationships with strangers within our communities.
Photo by author.
- 60 **Fig. 3.8** A mural spreading a message of positivity is painted on a garage door on Noble St. The mural had been painted during the COVID-19 pandemic.
Photo by author.
- 61 **Fig. 3.9** A poster campaign placed in front of a bike share on Noble St advocating for the philanthropic communities of Toronto to do more in addressing its urban inequalities.
Photo by author.
- 62 **Fig. 3.10** People wait in line to receive food donation boxes from the Parkdale Activity Recreation Centre (PARC) on Queen St W. The non-profit food rescue organization Second Harvest unloads their delivery.
Photo by author.
- 63 **Fig. 3.11** A fluorescent message on the non-profit artist-run centre Gallery 1313 reads, “[ART BUILDS SPACES AND] PLACES FOR EVERYONE.”
Photo by author.
- 63 **Fig. 3.12** Other fluorescent messages that read “SEE ME” and “HEAR ME” were found along Queen St W near one of West Neighbourhood House’s six locations in Toronto. These messages were posted during the COVID-19 pandemic.
Photo by author.

- 64 **Fig. 3.13** The Dunn Parkette Indigenous Garden.
Photo by author.
- 65 **Fig. 3.14** Colourful depictions of vegetables, plants, and insects painted on the wall adjacent to the Dunn Parkette Indigenous Garden.
Photo by author.
- 66 **Fig. 3.15** Masaryk Park with St. John's Polish National Catholic Cathedral in the background.
Photo by author.
- 67 **Fig. 3.16** Entry to H.O.P.E. Community Garden with the TCHC apartment building in the background.
Photo by author.
- 69 **Fig. 3.17** A series of art boards in the Dollarama parking lot depict Parkdale's vision for a community connected through food and culture. The pieces were done by the non-profit organization, Greenest City.
Photo collage by author.
- 70 **Fig. 3.18** One of the front entries to BPPC.
Photo by author.
- 73 **Fig. 3.19** Different varieties of social infrastructure surround BPPC.
Drawing by author.
- 74 **Fig. 3.20** The Parkdale Food Map helps community members find accessible food resources.
Retrieved from Parkdale People's Economy website: <https://parkdalepeopleseconomy.ca/food-network/>
- 75 **Fig. 3.21** Several of the community reports published by PPE.
Retrieved from *Parkdale Community Planning Study* (https://parkdalecommunityeconomies.files.wordpress.com/2016/11/20161121_pced_final.pdf); *Parkdale Community Benefits Framework* (<https://parkdalecommunityeconomies.files.wordpress.com/2018/11/parkdale-community-benefits-framework1.pdf>); and *Parkdale Community Wealth Building* (<http://parkdalepeopleseconomy.ca/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/Parkdale-Community-Wealth-Building-Report.pdf>)
- 76 **Fig. 3.22** The network of community organizations working towards the seven areas for community action and policy options established for South Parkdale.
Drawing by author.
- 78 **Fig. 3.23** Client visits to Daily Bread by month from January 2014 to September 2022.
Adapted from *Who's Hungry Report 2022*, 11, <https://www.dailybread.ca/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/DB-WhosHungryReport-2022-Digital-1.pdf>.

- 78 **Fig. 3.24** Recent growth in new Daily Bread clients (new clients as a percentage of all clients).
Adapted from *Who's Hungry Report 2022*, 18, <https://www.dailybread.ca/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/DB-WhosHungryReport-2022-Digital-1.pdf>.
- 79 **Fig. 3.25** Cover of *Who's Hungry Report 2022* published by Daily Bread Food Bank and North York Harvest Food Bank. Retrieved from *Who's Hungry Report 2022*, 1, <https://www.dailybread.ca/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/DB-WhosHungryReport-2022-Digital-1.pdf>.
- 80 **Fig. 3.26** Food insecurity can lead to a downward spiral of further crises--social isolation may also be considered as one. Adapted from *Who's Hungry Report 2022*, 14, <https://www.dailybread.ca/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/DB-WhosHungryReport-2022-Digital-1.pdf>. Originally sourced from Atlanta Community Food Bank, *Stories of Hunger - Atlanta Community Food Bank*, 2022. <https://www.acfb.org/stories-of-hunger/>
- 81 **Fig. 3.27** Food co-ops are co-owned by members of the community.
Adapted from Erbin Crowell, "Growing the Co-operative Food System," slideshow presentation from NOFA MASS Winter Conference. Worcester, MA: Neighboring Food Co-op Association, January 12, 2013. <https://www.slideshare.net/NFCACoops/growing-the-cooperative-food-system>
- 81 **Fig. 3.28** Previous store frontage of West End Food Co-op on Queen St W in 2018.
Photo retrieved from: <https://juliekinnear.com/blogs/west-end-food-coop>.
- 83 **Fig. 3.29** Looking into H.O.P.E. Community Garden next to Masaryk-Cowan Communiy Centre with BPPC in the background.
Photo by author.
- Bonar-Parkdale Presbyterian Church**
- 87 **Fig. 4.1** Looking up from the street-facing facade of BPPC.
Photo by author.
- 88 **Fig. 4.2** BPPC circa late 1880s.
Photo retrieved from public domain, courtesy of Toronto Public Library. <https://digitalarchive.tpl.ca/objects/344365/parkdale-presbyterian-church-dunn-avenue-west-side-south>
- 88 **Fig. 4.3** BPPC with the addition of the Institute Building visible, circa 1914.
Photo retrieved from public domain, courtesy of Toronto Public Library. <https://digitalarchive.tpl.ca/objects/331313/parkdale-presbyterian-church-toronto-canada-rev-a-l-g>
- 89 **Fig. 4.4** Street view of BPPC and the BPP seniors' addition today.
Photo by author.

- 91 **Fig. 4.5** Annotated ground floor plan of BPPC and BPP.
Drawing by author; scan underlay of drawing originally produced by Brown, Beck & Ross Architects, Toronto.
- 92 **Fig. 4.6** Annotated basement floor plan of BPPC and BPP.
Drawing by author; scan underlay of drawing originally produced by Brown, Beck & Ross Architects, Toronto.
- 93 **Fig. 4.7** Annotated second floor plan of BPPC and BPP.
Drawing by author; scan underlay of drawing originally produced by Brown, Beck & Ross Architects, Toronto.
- 94 **Fig. 4.8** Typical weekly schedule of BPPC pre-COVID-19 pandemic; not inclusive of all events (i.e. church celebrations, weddings, etc.) as they are atypical. The red bubbles refer to frequent but not regular weekly usage.
Drawing by author. The information on BPPC's previous scheduling was gathered from multiple phone call conversations with BPPC building manager in January and February 2023.
- 96 **Fig. 4.9** Typical weekly schedule of BPPC during COVID-19 pandemic; not inclusive of all events (i.e. church celebrations, weddings, etc.) as they are atypical. The red bubbles refer to frequent but not regular weekly usage.
Drawing by author. The information on BPPC's current scheduling was gathered from multiple phone call conversations with BPPC building manager in January and February 2023.
- 99 **Fig. 4.10** Facade of BPPC.
Photo by author.
- 100 **Fig. 4.11** In the winter of 2023, the church billboard has not been updated since 2021. Plastic buckets are placed at the ends of the front stair treads and railings due to the frequent littering and drug paraphernalia that is left behind.
Photo by author.
- 101 **Fig. 4.12** It appears as though a homeless person's belongings are tucked between the church building's buttresses along the north facade.
Photo by author.
- 102 **Fig. 4.13** One of two glass panes on the north facade of the church that is partially broken.
Photo by author.
- 103 **Fig. 4.14** Two of two glass panes on the north facade of the church that is partially broken.
Photo by author.
- 104 **Fig. 4.15** Part of the ceiling and the wall in the narthex showing signs of interior damage.
Photo by author.
- 105 **Fig. 4.16** Ceiling and wall damage in the north tower.
Photo by author.

- 106 **Fig. 4.17** Dust from water-damaged drywall collects on the floor of the sanctuary gallery. Buckets collect water during rainy days.
Photo by author.
- 107 **Fig. 4.18** The ceiling and wall along the south wall have experienced extensive damage from a roof leak, posing structural concerns.
Photo by author.
- 108 **Fig. 4.19** The church basement is used for miscellaneous storage with access to some of the building's service equipment.
Photo by author.
- 109 **Fig. 4.20** Ceiling damage above the organ and nave of the church building.
Photo by author.
- 110 **Fig. 4.21** More signs of water damage along the ceiling and wall towards the front of the church building.
Photo by author.
- 112 **Fig. 4.22** The sanctuary of the original BPPC building.
Photo by author.
- 112 **Fig. 4.23** The multipurpose 'Friendship' hall in the BPPC addition.
Photo by author.
- 114 **Fig. 4.24** An adjacent kitchen servery is useful for serving meals to people in the multipurpose hall.
Photo by author.
- 115 **Fig. 4.25** The shared outdoor terrace is in hiatus during the winter season.
Photo by author.
- 116 **Fig. 4.26** The front lobby to the church addition.
Photo by author.
- 117 **Fig. 4.27** One of the church's meeting rooms.
Photo by author.
- 118 **Fig. 4.28** The seniors' recreation room.
Photo by author.
- 119 **Fig. 4.29** The shared basement between the church and seniors' community.
Photo by author.
- 120 **Fig. 4.30** Longitudinal section of the existing BPPC/BPP building.
Drawing by author.
- 125 **Fig. 4.31** Longitudinal section of the existing BPPC/BPP building, with the parts of the building being questioned highlighted in yellow.
Drawing by author.
- 126 **Fig. 4.32** Axonometric of BPPC within its existing neighbourhood context of adjacent social infrastructures.
Drawing by author.

- 128 **Fig. 4.33** The continuum of secular adaptive reuses. The uses listed under the secular function align well with BPPC's existing uses as well as the needs of South Parkdale. Adapted from Larry C. Ledebur, "The "Highest and Best" in Adaptive Reuses," ed. Robert A. Simons et al., in *Retired, Rehabbed, Reborn: The Adaptive Reuse of America's Derelict Religious Buildings and Schools* (Kent, Ohio: The Kent State University Press, 2017), 171.
- 130 **Fig. 4.34** PPE's vision for Food Security includes the adaptive reuse of a church into a community food hub. Retrieved from Kuni Kamizaki, *Parkdale Planning Study - Summary Report* (Toronto, ON: Parkdale Community Economic Development (PCED) Planning Project, 2016), 21, https://parkdalecommunityeconomies.files.wordpress.com/2016/03/pced_planning-study_executive-report.pdf.
- 131 **Fig. 4.35** Children learning how to cook on height-adjustable cooking stations in the teaching kitchen at the Hackney School of Food. Project by Surman Weston in London, United Kingdom. Photo by Jim Stephenson, <http://surmanweston.com/projects/hackney-school-of-food/>.
- 132 **Fig. 4.36** The community using the multipurpose dining space at the Nourish Hub. Project by RCKa in London, United Kingdom. Photo by Francisco Ibanez Hantke, <https://rcka.co.uk/nourish-hub/>.
- 132 **Fig. 4.37** The large multipurpose space of Folkehuset Absalon. Project by Arcgency in Copenhagen, Denmark. Photo by Helene Høyer Mikkelsen, <https://www.troldtekt.com/references/culture/absalon/>.
- 133 **Fig. 4.38** The Crypt Redevelopment at Christ Church Spitalfields. Project by Dow Jones Architects in London, United Kingdom. Photo by David Grandorge, <https://www.dowjonesarchitects.com/projects/christ-church-spitalfields/>.
- 135 **Fig. 4.39** The three prongs of sustainability framework guiding many aspects of the design proposal. Drawing by author.

Design Proposal

- 139 **Fig. 5.1** View of the existing organ at BPPC. Photo by author.
- 140 **Fig. 5.2** The project is informed by and provides for the seven areas for community action and policy options established for South Parkdale. Drawing by author; icons adapted from Parkdale People's Economy. <https://parkdalepeopleseconomy.ca/>.
- 143 **Fig. 5.3** A word cloud highlighting the most used words in the 2016 *Parkdale Community Planning Study* report by PPE. Drawing by author.

- 144 **Fig. 5.4** Various sketches illustrating aspects involved in advancing project goals.
Drawings by author.
- 145 **Fig. 5.5** The revitalization is planned to be carried out in four phases.
Drawing by author.
- 146 **Fig. 5.6** A rough matrix was used to organize the proposed spaces beside the retained ones according to their respective publicness. It helped illustrate those spaces that could benefit from adjacency as well as the multiple activities that could take place in them.
Drawing by author.
- 149 **Fig. 5.7** Axonometric illustrating the proposed design interventions in relation to adjacent building context.
Drawing by author.
- 151 **Fig. 5.8** Axonometric illustrating the proposed design interventions on the ground floor.
Drawing by author.
- 152 **Fig. 5.9** Ground floor axonometric highlighting various user experiences of the revitalization near the front of the church building.
Drawing by author.
- 153 **Fig. 5.10** View of the church building porch in the event of an evening performance.
Visualization by author.
- 154 **Fig. 5.11** Ground floor axonometric highlighting various user experiences of the revitalization in the public outdoor area.
Drawing by author.
- 155 **Fig. 5.12** View of the plaza area towards the church building in the event of an outdoor market.
Visualization by author.
- 156 **Fig. 5.13** Ground floor axonometric highlighting various user experiences near the seniors' area.
Drawing by author.
- 157 **Fig. 5.14** View towards the flexible community rooms from the community lobby in a teaching scenario.
Visualization by author.
- 158 **Fig. 5.15** The provision of flexible components help facilitate various community activities throughout the day. The demountable market stalls are inspired by those used in Piazza San Cosimato.
Drawing by author.
- 160 **Fig. 5.16** Ground floor axonometric highlighting various user experiences around the communal garden.
Drawing by author.
- 161 **Fig. 5.17** View from the communal garden towards the revitalized building.
Visualization by author.

- 162 **Fig. 5.18** Ground floor axonometric highlighting various user experiences in the food corner area.
Drawing by author.
- 163 **Fig. 5.19** View from the food corner atrium towards the community garden, with the seated stair and commercial kitchen on either side.
Visualization by author.
- 165 **Fig. 5.20** Axonometric illustrating the proposed design interventions on the basement floor.
Drawing by author.
- 166 **Fig. 5.21** Basement floor axonometric highlighting various user experiences within the building.
Drawing by author.
- 167 **Fig. 5.22** View from food co-op aisles with the seated stair in the background.
Visualization by author.
- 169 **Fig. 5.23** Axonometric illustrating the proposed design interventions on the second floor.
Drawing by author.
- 170 **Fig. 5.24** Second floor axonometric highlighting various user experiences around the food corner.
Drawing by author.
- 171 **Fig. 5.25** View inside the hydroponics area.
Visualization by author.
- 172 **Fig. 5.26** Second floor axonometric highlighting various user experiences around the large multipurpose space.
Drawing by author.
- 173 **Fig. 5.27** The mezzanine level provides moments for more intimate social meetings while serving as circulation to other community spaces. The visual connection to the outdoor plaza is strengthened, and visual opportunities are maintained to the large multipurpose space below.
Visualization by author.
- 174 **Fig. 5.28** Ground floor axonometric highlighting various user experiences around the large multipurpose space.
Drawing by author.
- 175 **Fig. 5.29** View of the large multipurpose space during relaxed community usage.
Visualization by author.
- 176 **Fig. 5.30** Adaptable components of the large multipurpose space.
Drawing by author.
- 178 **Fig. 5.31** Adaptable components of the large multipurpose space labelled, shown open.
Drawing by author.
- 179 **Fig. 5.32** View of the large multipurpose space during a social dining event.
Visualization by author.

- 180 **Fig. 5.33** Adaptable components of the large multipurpose space in their midway state.
Drawing by author.
- 181 **Fig. 5.34** View of the large multipurpose space in transition.
Visualization by author.
- 182 **Fig. 5.35** Adaptable components of the large multipurpose space labelled, shown closed.
Drawing by author.
- 183 **Fig. 5.36** View of the large multipurpose space during an educational learning session.
Visualization by author.
- 184 **Fig. 5.37** Longitudinal section of the revitalized building; the large multipurpose space depicts a largely-opened configuration of adaptable components in a casual community scenario.
Drawing by author.

Conclusion

- 189 **Fig. 6.1** View of the north facade of BPPC.
Photo by author.
- 191 **Fig. 6.2** Parkdale People's Palace will better contribute to the network of social infrastructures and rewire the way that people experience community in South Parkdale.
Drawing by author.
- 192 **Fig. 6.3** Looking up at the tower of BPPC from its north facade.
Photo by author.

List of Abbreviations

AA	Alcoholics Anonymous
BPP	Bonar-Parkdale Place
BPPC	Bonar-Parkdale Presbyterian Church
NIA	Neighbourhood Improvement Area
PARC	Parkdale Activity Recreation Centre
PCED	Parkdale Community Economic Development
PCFB	Parkdale Community Food Bank
PFN	Parkdale Food Network
PPE	Parkdale People's Economy
TCF	Trinity Centres Foundation
UCC	United Church of Canada
WEFC	West-End Food Co-op

Sociocultural Context:

Introduction



What do we stand for? ...

Position

“Architecture is saved from obsolescence and appears contemporary as it is framed and reframed by preservation as culturally significant.”¹

- Jorge Otero-Pailos, *Preservation is Overtaking Us*

Coinciding with the beginnings of increased environmental awareness, the decline of religion in North America is also said to have begun around the 1960s.^{2,3} In 2013, the Pew Research Center published a report on Canada’s changing religious landscape, highlighting trends in the growth of a population that is religiously unaffiliated, the growth of previously less-prominent religious groups that are not Christian, and an overall decline in religious service attendance.⁴ These trends have continued along their previous trajectories. According to Statistics Canada’s 2021 Census of Population, Christians still hold the largest percentage of religious affiliation—53%⁵—but the percentage has declined considerably since the 2011 National Household Survey, when Christians made up 67% of the population.⁶ Within the same timeframe, the category of ‘other religions’ has gone up 3 percentage points,

¹ Jorge Otero-Pailos, “Supplement to OMA’s Preservation Manifesto,” in *Preservation Is Overtaking Us*, ed. Jordan Carver (New York, NY: GSAPP Books, 2014), <https://www.arch.columbia.edu/books/reader/6-preservation-is-overtaking-us#reader-anchor-0>.

² Jessica Mace, “Redundant since Construction: The Fate of Two Late-Nineteenth-Century Churches in Toronto,” in *Le Devenir Des Églises: Patrimonialisation Ou Disparition*, eds. Thomas Coomans and Jean-Sébastien Sauvé (Québec: Presses de l’Université du Québec, 2014), 117, <https://books.scholarsportal.info/uri/ebooks/ebooks4/lupress4/2019-03-25/1/9782760541771>.

³ Mark A. Noll, “What Happened to Christian Canada?,” *Church History* 75, no. 2 (2006): 251, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/27644765>.

⁴ “Canada’s Changing Religious Landscape,” Pew Research Center, June 27, 2013, <https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2013/06/27/canadas-changing-religious-landscape/>.

⁵ Statistics Canada. *2021 Census of Population – Canada Census Profile Table*. [Catalogue no. 98-316-X2021001]. Ottawa, ON, 2023. Accessed June 11, 2023. <https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2021/dp-pd/prof/index.cfm?Lang=E>.

⁶ Statistics Canada. *Canada (Code 01) - 2011 National Household Survey (NHS) Profile Table*. [Catalogue no. 99-004-XWE]. Ottawa, ON, 2013. Accessed June 11, 2023. <http://www12.statcan.gc.ca/nhs-enm/2011/dp-pd/prof/index.cfm?Lang=E>.

Fig. 1.1 Parliament St. Methodist (United) Church during demolition circa 1952. ←

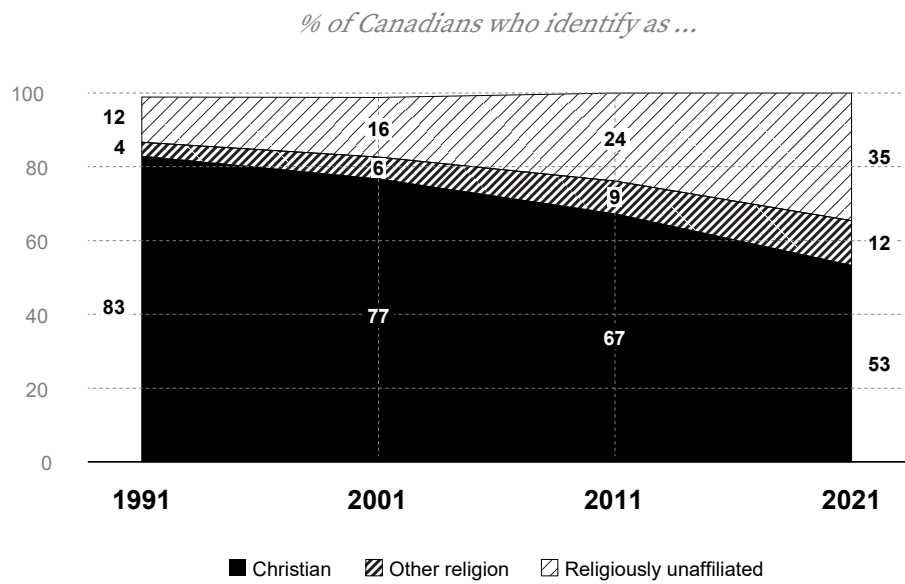


Fig. 1.2 Canada's religious composition from 1991-2021.

and the category of ‘religiously unaffiliated’ has gone up 11 percentage points.⁷ To add further to this decline, about two-thirds of Canadians think that the overall power of religion is less significant today than it was 20 years ago, despite a slight majority favouring its increased presence in society.⁸ As Canada breaks its own record annually for the largest number of immigrants welcomed to the country—surpassing a total of 430,000 newcomers in 2022⁹—the once highly-Christian religious landscape of Canada is gradually becoming more diverse.¹⁰

Within this context of shifting sociocultural attitude away from religion, the fate of Canada’s faith buildings is undoubtedly being tested. In 2016, the National Trust for Canada stated that they expect one-third of Canada’s 27,000 places of worship to disappear within the next decade.¹¹ One can assume this figure mainly includes Christian places of worship, namely church buildings, due to the historic evangelism that occurred during settler colonization across the country. The decline is in part due to the trend of secularization within the general population and the disappearance of aging congregations, which both contribute to lower levels of public support; the resulting drop of regular church attendees impacts levels of steady funding for a church congregation despite the tax exemptions allotted to them.¹² This resulting financial strain threatens both the upkeep of crucial building repairs and the ability of a congregation to deliver community programming and outreach. These complications leave a congregation little choice but to make a difficult decision regarding its place of gathering, such as having to sell to a prospective developer, introducing new stakeholder partnerships or uses, or undesirably incurring further financial strain. While the governance structures of the various faith groups present in our cities differ in their

⁷ Statistics Canada, *2021 Census of Population*.

⁸ Jacob Poushter, Janell Fetterolf, and Christine Tamir, “3. How people around the world view religion’s role in their countries,” in *A Changing World: Global Views on Diversity, Gender Equality, Family Life and the Importance of Religion*, Pew Research Center, April 22, 2019, <https://www.pewresearch.org/global/2019/04/22/how-people-around-the-world-view-religions-role-in-their-countries/>.

⁹ Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, “Canada Welcomes Historic Number of Newcomers in 2022,” January 3, 2023, <https://www.canada.ca/en/immigration-refugees-citizenship/news/2022/12/canada-welcomes-historic-number-of-newcomers-in-2022.html>.

¹⁰ Michael Lipka, “5 Facts about Religion in Canada,” Pew Research Center, July 1, 2019, <https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2019/07/01/5-facts-about-religion-in-canada/>.

¹¹ Natalie Bull, “A Hope and a Prayer for Places of Faith,” National Trust for Canada (National Trust for Canada, April 22, 2016), <https://nationaltrustcanada.ca/online-stories/a-hope-and-a-prayer-for-places-of-faith>.

¹² Private donations from regular churchgoers and tax-exemptions are often the main ways that a church finances itself. See Barry Magrill, *A Commerce of Taste: Church Architecture in Canada, 1867-1914* (Montreal, QC: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2012), 1, <https://books.scholarsportal.info/uri/ebooks/ebooks3/upress/2013-08-23/1/9780773587007>.

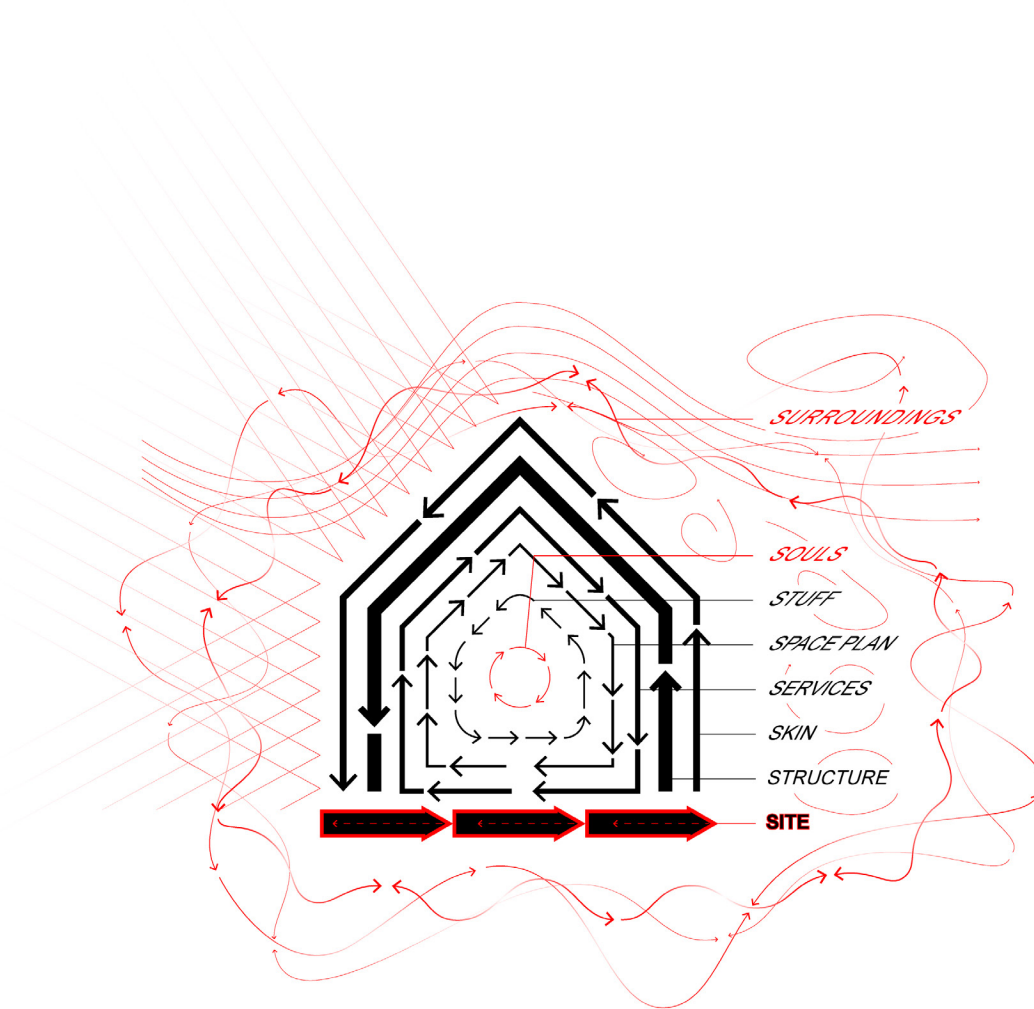


Fig. 1.3 Revised Shearing Layers of Change diagram.

decision-making processes, their choices can drastically change the direction of a community and its local values. Of the 9,000 places of worship facing an uncertain future in Canada, how do they move forward sustainably?

Since the 1980s, when the term ‘sustainable development’ became popularized,¹³ the focus on sustainability within cities has remained a prominent topic across many disciplines and become a driving force within architectural discourse and practice. The well-known ‘triple bottom line’ of sustainable development, which foregrounds society, economy, and the environment,¹⁴ is a target that architects are repeatedly urged to prioritize in both new-build and renovation projects. As we think about sociocultural change and the sustainability of buildings, it may be useful to consider American author and editor of the Whole Earth Catalog Stewart Brand, and his notable diagram called Shearing Layers of Change, adapted from architect Frank Duffy’s original concept.¹⁵ The diagram breaks down a building’s components into six parts: *Site*, *Structure*, *Skin*, *Services*, *Space plan*, and *Stuff*. Its usefulness lies in attributing a building’s various layers into relational dependencies, as well as assigning separate rates of change and average lifespans to each one of them due to their differing circumstances. For example, the more fixed (and more costly to change) *Structure* layer dictates the organization of the *Skin* layer, which is more easily changed. These layers can influence each other in varying degrees and times across a building’s lifespan, from initial design conversations to the building’s end-of-life. In principle, Brand summarizes that within the relational hierarchy of these layers, “the speedy components propose, and the slow dispose.”¹⁶ He even goes as far to suggest “a seventh ‘S’—human *Souls* at the very end of the hierarchy”¹⁷—to complete the picture, hinting at the integral nature of people in the lifespan and change of a building.

Perhaps even more relevant today is the revised version of this diagram, presented in *The Architecture of Persistence: Designing for Future Use*, where authors David Fannon, Michelle Laboy, and Peter Wiederspahn propose two changes. First, that the *Site* layer is instead understood not as constant, but as one that changes, albeit slowly; and second, that buildings tolerate an additional layer known as *Surroundings*— “the changing environmental and cultural conditions (atmospheres)”¹⁸—that are likewise capable of

¹³ Jacobus A. Du Pisani, “Sustainable Development – Historical Roots of the Concept,” *Environmental Sciences* 3, no. 2 (2006): 92, <https://doi.org/10.1080/15693430600688831>.

¹⁴ Du Pisani, “Sustainable Development,” 92.

¹⁵ Stewart Brand, *How Buildings Learn: What Happens After They’re Built* (New York, NY: Penguin Books, 1995), 12-13.

¹⁶ I interpret Brand’s use of the word ‘dispose’ as in ‘set in order.’ See Brand, *How Buildings Learn*, 17.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ Michelle Laboy, “Material Ecologies”, in *The Architecture of Persistence: Designing for Future Use*, eds. David Fannon, Michelle Laboy, and Peter Wiederspahn (New York, NY: Routledge, 2022), 20.



Fig. 1.4 Interior damage and possible structural damage caused by a roof leak visible in Bonar-Parkdale Presbyterian Church (BPPC).

impacting their lifespan. This seventh layer (or eighth, if you include *Souls*) is found outside of the building components and at the top of the hierarchy. While it represents ecological flows with direct day-to-day effects on the building envelope, such as solar, wind, and rain, it more importantly alludes to the dynamic social context.¹⁹ The collective attitude of the people in a region can dictate the construction, maintenance, or demolition of a building, either in full or slowly over time via its respective layers. Akin to the other layers, the resilience of a building's components, or the lack thereof, can influence the surrounding social environment. Thus, material change in architecture directly affects and is similarly directly affected by its social counterpart.²⁰

In Canada as in the United States, today's church building aims to "[function] as the community social center (and polling place during elections), will have a suite of offices, library, day-care facilities, possibly a food and clothing bank, space for Sunday School, an elementary or secondary school, a social hall with connecting kitchen, ... [and] a parking lot" which can be reappropriated for various outdoor activities.²¹ This modified approach towards increased programming and functional spaces for use by groups other than the church community is how many of the surviving church buildings in Canada have adapted today. In the report *No Space for Community: The Value of Faith Buildings and the Effect of Their Loss in Ontario*, author Kendra Fry observes that most people use faith buildings for non-religious purposes—often cultural, recreational, and social—and for their convenient location, accessibility, and affordability.²² These qualities situate church buildings as crucial community assets, especially for local organizations that need community space and operate with limited resources and income. As cities work to protect church buildings for their heritage, they must also retain their social functions because urban centres need places that create "social capital"—a concept commonly used to measure people's relationships and interpersonal networks."²³ Sociologist and author of *Palaces for the People* Eric Klinenberg mentions that churches—like libraries, schools, and even coffee shops—are known as 'social infrastructure.' Even in their unaltered condition, churches are places that embody "the physical conditions that determine whether social capital develops."²⁴ These buildings are more than their material

¹⁹ Laboy, "Material Ecologies," 20.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Wilbur Zelinsky, "The Uniqueness of the American Religious Landscape," *Geographical Review* 91, no. 3 (2001): 572, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3594741>.

²² Kendra Fry, *No Space for Community: The Value of Faith Buildings and the Effect of Their Loss in Ontario* (Toronto, ON: Faith & the Common Good, 2020), 1, https://d3n8a8pro7vhmx.cloudfront.net/faithcommongood/pages/838/attachments/original/1594847267/No_Space_for_Community-compressed.pdf?1594847267.

²³ Eric Klinenberg, *Palaces for the People: How Social Infrastructure Can Help Fight Inequality, Polarization, and the Decline of Civic Life* (New York, NY: Crown, 2018), 5.

²⁴ Klinenberg, *Palaces for the People*, 5.

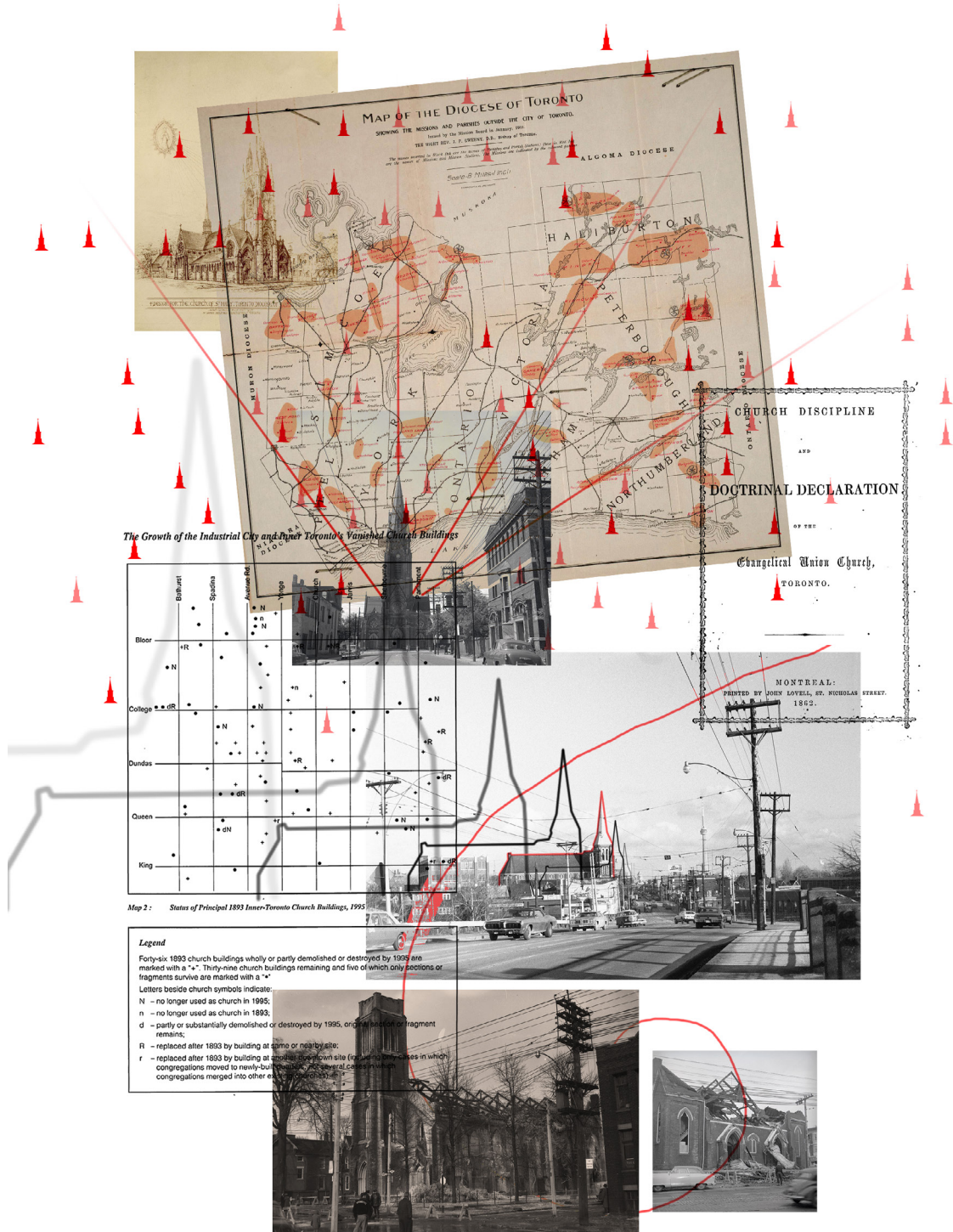


Fig. 1.5 The proliferation and eventual decline of churches in Toronto.

assemblies and their physical presence in their context, because they enable and promote social interactions through their spaces and programs. The social mission that they support are more important to sustain than the contributions brought forth by maintaining their heritage features per se.

However, not all church buildings are able to adequately fulfill social needs, in particular, older ones. The sanctuary is often retained in its original design, maintaining a rigid layout of pews in situ within the expanse of a large and open room, limiting it to certain functions. Aesthetic choices related to religious worship belonging of a previous era may not be as resonant with people today. The 'shearing layers of change' visibly deteriorate and simultaneously pose various safety issues to its users. These old church buildings are often the oldest within a community's fabric and therefore often also under heritage protections, which limits their potential to be socially constructive. Even though many of the city's urban church buildings are accompanied by ancillary spaces, such as a hall or a kitchen, they are often an attached subsidiary to the main church building, in a way that is removed and not as thoughtfully integrated. The commonplace opportunities for socializing are relegated to these ancillary spaces at the periphery when they could be centred and celebrated more forwardly.

Among the sociocultural awareness of decreased influence of Christianity, rising financial pressures, and a changing climate, new, and at times confrontational, questions have emerged regarding the existing condition of our neighbourhoods and cities. Such questions include how architects should approach the adaptation of existing buildings, especially its older and historically significant ones. In the context of the city, certain interrogatives may also follow: What building is to be adapted, and why? For whom are we adapting the building? If decided, how will the adaptation of the building unfold? The role that architects play in shaping a socially, environmentally, and economically sustainable built environment within these circumstances calls for us to continuously reassess the evolving axiological tendencies of increasingly multivalent urban populations and their respective built environments. Older, unchanged church buildings suffer most from the declining religious trends previously stated, and part of that can be attributed to their concern with preservation.

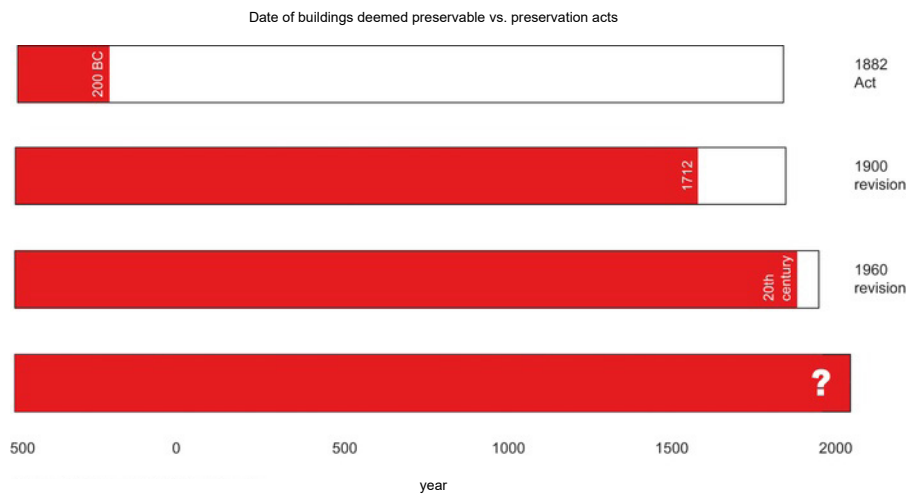


Fig. 1.6 The timeframe between a building's existence and its protected preservation has tapered over time.

“It’s when we are experiencing as a culture a kind of anxiety about who we are, what is real, what do we really stand for, what is our identity, that’s when we go back to these places and begin to question them.”²⁵

- Jorge Otero-Pailos, “Architecture and Human Attachment”

A generally agreed definition of preservation is “the maintenance and repair of existing historic materials and retention of [a] property’s form as it has evolved over time.”²⁶ In 2004, architect and founder of OMA Rem Koolhaas assertively declared that “preservation is overtaking us.”²⁷ He pointed out that, from the time humanity initially began with the preservation of habitable places, “the interval or the distance between the present and what was preserved” drew closer over time, which Koolhaas finds both “incredibly exciting and slightly absurd” (Fig. 1.6).²⁸ This notion effectively demonstrates a broadening of the scope of buildings or landscapes worthy of preservation, potentially including those that may have only been built relatively recently. One could argue that he criticized the romanticization of old buildings within our cities and the potential confinement of ultimate, creative freedom in architecture and development. In a literary reflection published as an addition to Koolhaas’ original beliefs, director and professor of Historic Preservation at Columbia GSAPP Jorge Otero-Pailos explains that for Koolhaas, “one of the fundamentals of architecture is the need for constant supplementation in order to overcome obsolescence ... [and] to sustain cultural significance.”²⁹ Preservation can be quite minimally effective in this regard; it does not necessarily require architectural intervention to be impactful. So long as the reframing of the architecture is achieved, thereby attuning it to its context, obsolescence may be temporarily avoided; for example, in the use of plaques to focus a viewer on a particular feature on a site. While one can argue the historical and educational merits of maintaining buildings of the past as close to their original condition as possible, this effectively treats them as artifacts and makes them less likely to serve in more socially relevant ways. Is there a point at which this method of preservation becomes detrimental to public good?

²⁵ Ted Shelton and Tricia Stuth, “Architecture and Human Attachment: An Interview with Jorge Otero-Pailos,” *Journal of Architectural Education* 72, no. 2 (2018): 196. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10464883.2018.1496725>.

²⁶ James Douglas, *Building Adaptation*, 2nd ed. (Butterworth-Heinemann, 2006), 588.

²⁷ Rem Koolhaas, “Preservation Is Overtaking Us,” *Future Anterior: Journal of Historic Preservation, History, Theory, and Criticism* 1, no. 2 (2004): 2, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25834941>.

²⁸ Koolhaas, “Preservation is Overtaking Us,” 2.

²⁹ Jorge Otero-Pailos, “Supplement to OMA’s Preservation Manifesto.”



Fig. 1.7 A derelict church in England found new community purpose by providing new programs and revitalized spaces.

Assessing the context within which a building is situated is key to determining whether preservation will serve a community well. However, context does not merely include the direct, perceivable physicality of a place, “but also the aesthetic, cultural, and intellectual framework within which it holds currency and value.”³⁰ Within the context of the decline of Christianity and old church buildings in Canada, one cannot help but wonder how these buildings might evolve in the future. How do church buildings survive when changing sociocultural attitudes around Christianity no longer position them as relevant places in the way they once did? Spaces and programming that once suited this specific religious ideal need to be scrutinized under the various social, environmental, and financial circumstances present in a community and its larger context of the city. However, preservation is not primarily concerned with sustainability, despite it being a beneficial byproduct of preservation.

In an interview for the *Journal of Architectural Education*, Otero-Pailos argues that preservation is less about sustainability and more about “dealing with human attachment to things.”³¹ The ‘human attachment’ that preservation seeks to achieve through the mediation between buildings and people is more directed at sustaining a relationship with the past than addressing the unmet social needs of today. Thus, it is not always socially meaningful for a community’s buildings to be maintained as they are or to be restored to their former glory. The changing social priorities of an urban community are best met when their building context can accommodate those priorities, which preservation does not necessarily provide. However, in some ways, adaptation can be understood as an act of preservation. Even though it involves “any work to a building over and above maintenance to change its capacity, function or performance,”³² adaptation can preserve a building’s essence.³³ Building adaptation serves well when preservation is insufficient, especially when considering that substantial building changes can introduce new and more functionally relevant frameworks within an existing building. While the old church buildings that still stand to this day are not all necessarily disused, the trends previously identified point to one of impending struggle. Adaptation can be viewed as a vital strategy for maintaining part of a building’s heritage but, more importantly, for creating renewed sociocultural relevance within it.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Shelton and Stuth, “Architecture and Human Attachment,” 193.

³² Douglas, *Building Adaptation*, 583.

³³ I mention *can* because not all adaptations retain a building’s essence. For example, the adaptation of a church into residential lofts removes the open, uninterrupted space of the sanctuary through the addition of walls and floors. Further explanation is provided in the *Toronto* section of this thesis.



Fig. 1.8 The church adaptation of Folkehuset Absalon maintains key architectural features and a robust social mission.

Otero-Pailos further mentions that a key challenge in preservation is “to on the one hand provide a sense of continuity with the past, and on the other hand, gently frustrate that sense of continuity with the past.”³⁴ Because the changes that come with adaptation are more substantial, finding an appropriate design solution is critical.

Assistant architectural professor You-Kyong Ahn discusses the adaptive reuse of historic churches and their preservation as communal or social symbols. She studies the comparison between professionals’ and non-professionals’ preferences to validate James Douglas’ and Derek Latham’s claims that “the least changes in both sociocultural and architectural traits are ... considered as the most desirable reuse in order to preserve the church as a community/social symbol.”³⁵ Through a quantitative study, Ahn concludes that non-professionals, who in her study represent non-design trained people, are more concerned with the preservation of sociocultural traits of churches than the degree of physical changes made to a building in a church reuse project.³⁶ While the preservation of prominent physical features such as a large atrium space is still preferred,³⁷ these findings underscore the significance of community-oriented design in the adaptation of historic church buildings. Ahn further defends this through the works of architectural authors Dolores Hayden, Lynda Schneekloth, and Robert G. Shibley, stating that “a community’s engagement with their built environment is a foundation of the community/social value of the environment; and their attachment to the value of the environment helps its sustainability.”³⁸ One can then argue that the success of a community-oriented adaptation of a church building will depend on how well it can engage with its community, which ultimately challenges design aspects of the original church building in being able to facilitate its communal goals.

³⁴ Shelton and Stuth, “Architecture and Human Attachment,” 197.

³⁵ James Douglas, *Building Adaptation* (Oxford, UK: Butterworth Heinemann, 2002) and Derek Latham, *Creative Re-use of Buildings*, vols. 1-2 (Shaftesbury, UK: Donhead, 2000) paraphrased in You-Kyong Ahn, “Professionals’ and Non-Professionals’ Preferences of Adaptive Reuses of Historic Churches and Preservation of the Churches as a Community Symbol,” in *Le Devenir Des Églises: Patrimonialisation Ou Disparition*, eds. Thomas Coomans and Jean-Sébastien Sauvé (Québec: Presses de l’Université du Québec, 2014), 196.

³⁶ You-Kyong Ahn, “Professionals’ and Non-Professionals’ Preferences of Adaptive Reuses,” 221.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 197.

³⁸ Dolores Hayden, *The Power of Place: Urban Landscape as Public History* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1995); Lynda H. Schneekloth and Robert G. Shibley, *Placemaking: The Art and Practice of Building Communities*, (New York, NY: John Wiley, 1995) and Lynda H. Schneekloth and Robert G. Shibley “Implacing Architecture into the Practice of Placemaking,” *Journal of Architectural Education* 53, no. 3 (2000), 130-140; all paraphrased in *Ibid.*, 199.

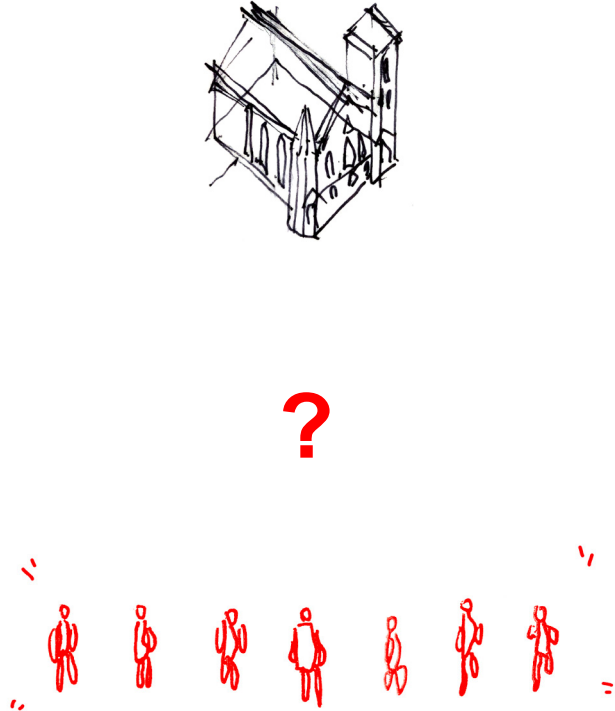


Fig. 1.9 How can a church building adapt to gain a revitalized community significance?

Church adaptations might be best achieved by aligning their affordances—or “the support provided by the environment to an organism, furnishing or affording the organism with an opportunity to act in a particular way”³⁹—more closely towards new societal meaning. Arriving at an understanding of a community’s priorities is essential because a specific adaptation may be more relevant in one context but not in another. The existing social context, which includes local narratives, demographics, and community stakeholders, is critical to identify and build upon, in addition to understanding the shortcomings and future opportunities of the existing building. The building will need to provide and to simultaneously be provided by its locale in order to survive; both must work together to be sustainable for each other. How do the previous societal narratives found in old church buildings weave together with current narratives and suggest an adaptation that is more relevant to a community today? This thesis asks: *how can a waning church building in Canada gain new sociocultural significance through architectural adaptation and become a ‘palace for the people’?*

Scope

This thesis speculates on the transformation of one church site within Toronto, which was studied through firsthand observation and repeated visits. An environmental scan, documenting the people, places, and things shaping a context helps one understand the physical context more deeply. This kind of empirical approach attempts to make the speculation more closely aligned with actual needs. To quote authors Anthony Dunne and Fiona Raby from the book *Speculative Everything*:

*By speculating more, at all levels of society, and exploring alternative scenarios, reality will become more malleable and, although the future cannot be predicted, we can help set in place today factors that will increase the probability of more desirable futures happening.*⁴⁰

Toronto is an ideal location to research the questions posed by this thesis given the city’s large inventory of older church buildings. The outcomes of their decline and/or survival have the potential to shape neighbourhoods and the overall direction of urban development, which inherently impacts public life. Understanding the larger narratives that push church buildings toward their specific outcomes situates them within the complex interchange of politics and capitalist-driven development. The decisions that church building managers must make regarding their building’s outcome

³⁹ Andrew M. Colman, “Affordance,” in *A Dictionary of Psychology* (Oxford University Press, 2008), https://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780199534067_001.0001/acref-9780199534067-e-205.

⁴⁰ Anthony Dunne and Fiona Raby, *Speculative Everything: Design, Fiction, and Social Dreaming* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 2013), 6.

during times of financial instability may not permit them to entertain their preferred options, such as preservation or even specific kinds of adaptation. It is important to steer urban development towards those voices and initiatives that further the city's larger sustainable goals by making community-oriented voices more heard.

Despite there being roughly 9,000 places of worship at risk of disappearing across Canada, the adaptation of a single church site allows one to focus on understanding a particular community and building. Each site bears its own specific context, limitations, and opportunities that are each worth considering. Although we can classify a church building as a place of worship—i.e., a building type—it varies across denominations by characteristics such as floor layout, architectural style, and massing typology, to name a few. Church denominations exist because religious values differ, and that is respectively reflected in their architecture. The goal of this thesis is not to provide a mass-produced solution because it is not worthwhile; however, applying a specific design framework to one church building can suggest potential scalability, which can similarly be applied to other scenarios.

The adaptation of church buildings has been a common practice globally, nationally, and even municipally within Toronto. The global adaptations vary from residential, cultural, commercial, and recreational projects; they are also more widespread, especially in cities that have been established with Christian roots for a much longer time. Canada is comparatively recent regarding its relationship with Christianity, which has effectively not allowed for as many adaptations to have been explored.

This is not a thesis about saving church buildings for their heritage alone; rather, it explores how a church site can tap into communal narratives to have renewed social purpose for people. Redundant church buildings may find new opportunities by tying into their local network of existing social infrastructures.

Structure

The thesis is broken down into the following parts:

The first part explores the history and trajectory of church development in Toronto, as well as the underlying concerns and narratives currently preoccupying the city. These present-day concerns are used to inform the challenges and potentials that a resulting design adaptation could respond to; they also help identify a neighbourhood within which a specific church site is to be selected.

The second part delves into the selected neighbourhood of South Parkdale. Through an exercise in observation by walking around the neighbourhood, as well as the discovery of a feasibility study, a church facing potential decline appears. Contextual understanding is developed through photography, mapping, and neighbourhood reports.

Clear community stakeholders and narratives about food security and social infrastructure emerge, which are used to inform the potential future users and reprogramming opportunities in the proposal for church adaptation.

The third part investigates the selected site of Bonar-Parkdale Presbyterian Church (BPPC) in its current condition. By gathering on-site photography and details on its typical weekly usage, signs of disrepair and disuse emerge. An exercise in understanding the existing built form through floor plans and 3D modeling helps reveal its latent qualities and shortcomings. A closer look at the building's site adjacencies reveals potential relationships with its broader physical context to connect it more closely to its community. Relevant community information and design precedents related to food and community are gathered to inform the design proposal.

The fourth part imagines the adaptation of BPPC into a community food hub that seeks to be flexible to different user groups' needs over time. Drawings, diagrams, and visualizations illustrate the various social capacities of the revitalized church property.

The thesis concludes with reflections on the design proposal and broadens the discussion to interrelated topics of politics and financing, as well as further discussions on heritage and social infrastructure within the city. They point to the symbolically charged nature of such religious heritage and the potential role that they may play in the future social life of our urban communities.

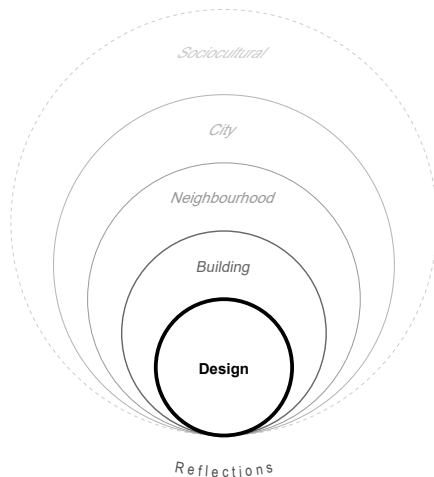


Fig. 1.10 The thesis proceeds from a large-scale understanding of issues towards smaller ones that eventually lead to a design proposal.

City Context:

Toronto



Dovercourt Rd

30

How do we stand the test of time? ...

“A City of Churches”

“No other city on the American continent presents such a spectacle as is seen every Sunday evening on the streets of Toronto.”⁴¹

- Josh Ross Robertson, *Landmarks of Toronto*

Toronto’s churches are an iconic part of its historic city fabric, often the oldest buildings in any neighbourhood. The city’s church development is not unique—its church buildings have survived, been converted, or been demolished—but it is noteworthy that it once held the reputation of being “the evangelical centre of the New World, with more churches per capita than any other city.”⁴² In a magazine issue of *Toronto Illustrated* from 1893, it was said that “heaven-pointing spires ... rise from every part of the city and ... form a leading feature of the place.”⁴³ The city attained this acclaimed status due to its third phase of church building, which occurred around the late nineteenth century.⁴⁴ The churches being built at this time were in the Gothic revival style; a style that “signified a determination to proclaim anew a world of spiritual values at the very time when these values were in danger of being lost” to secularism.⁴⁵ Thus, church development and its architecture were linked with a desire to strengthen the ecclesiastical position and values in an increasingly secular society. Also contributing to the sheer number of churches were the multiplicity of Christian denominations each

⁴¹ John Ross Robertson, *Landmarks of Toronto: A Collection of Historical Sketches, Vol. 4* (Toronto: J.R. Robertson, 1904), 373, quoted in Jon Caulfield, “The Growth of the Industrial City and Inner Toronto’s Vanished Church Buildings,” *Urban History Review = Revue d’Histoire Urbaine* 23, no. 2 (1995): 12, <http://search.proquest.com.proxy.lib.uwaterloo.ca/scholarly-journals/growth-industrial-city-inner-torontos-vanished/docview/1300091447/se-2>.

⁴² Jasmine Frolick, “Altered: The Evolution of Toronto’s Church Landscape,” *The Canadian Architect* 61, no. 9 (2016): 36, <http://search.proquest.com.proxy.lib.uwaterloo.ca/trade-journals/altered-evolution-torontos-church-landscape/docview/1816776406/se-2>.

⁴³ *Toronto Illustrated 1893* (Toronto: Consolidated Illustrating Company, 1893), 34, quoted in Caulfield, “The Growth of the Industrial City,” 3.

⁴⁴ Caulfield, “The Growth of the Industrial City,” 10.

⁴⁵ William Westfall, *Two Worlds: Protestant Culture of Nineteenth-Century Ontario* (Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1989), 134-135, quoted in Caulfield, “The Growth of the Industrial City,” 9.

Fig. 2.1 Looking towards the West 40 Lofts (formerly St. Mary the Virgin Anglican Church) in the background. ←

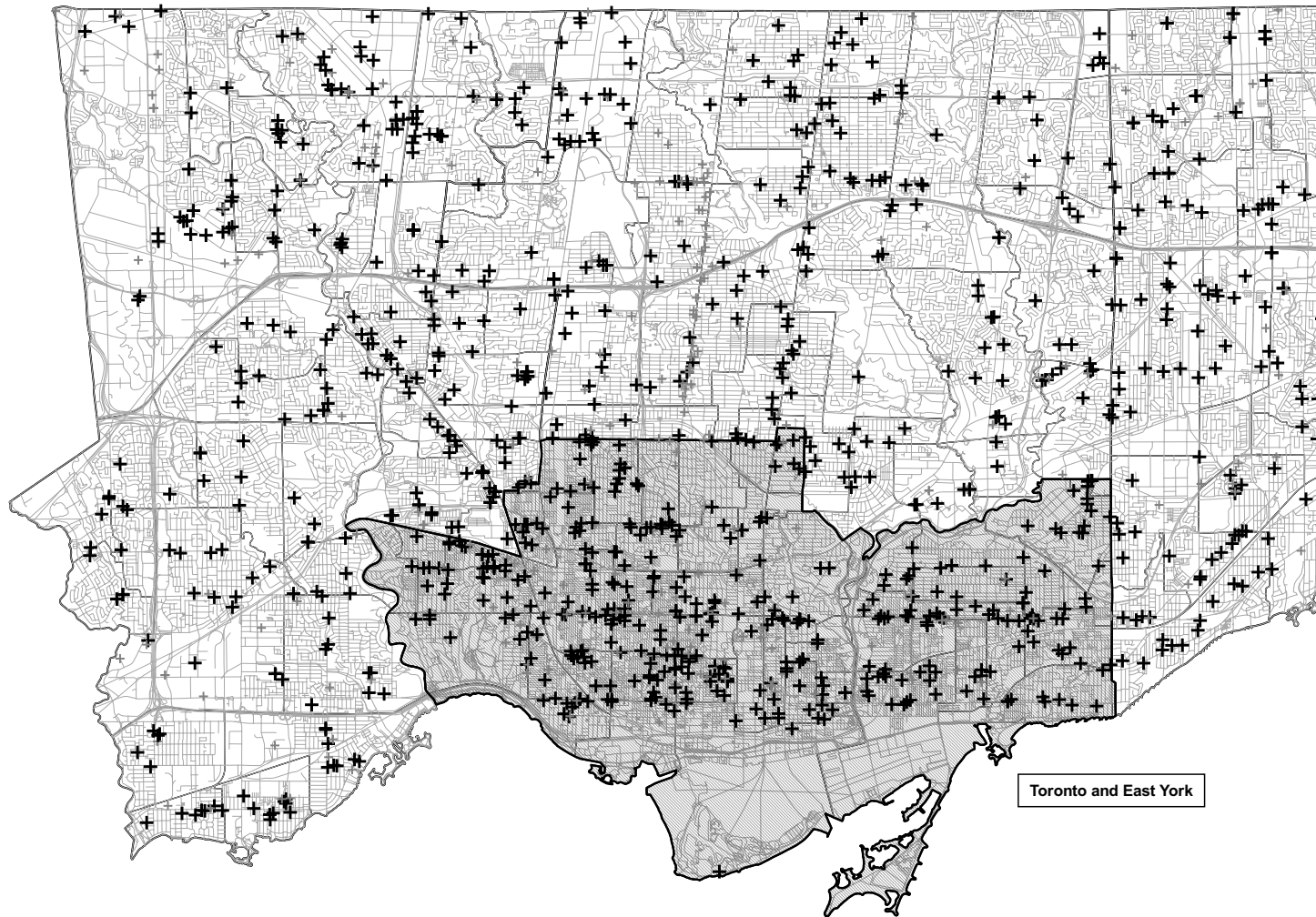
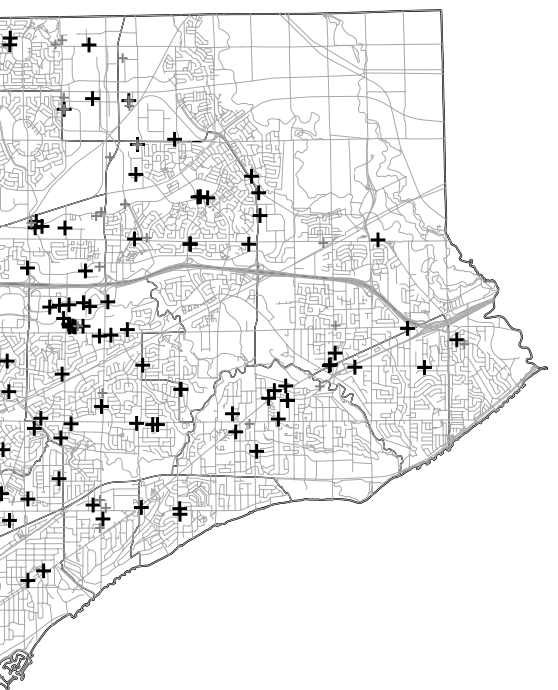


Fig. 2.2 Map of Christian churches and all other places of worship in Toronto as of 2006.

building their own religious foundations in a new city, at the very time that city was being built. As waves of largely Christian immigrants arrived in Toronto, each community created facilities to house their religious and social traditions. While Toronto was labelled a “city of churches” for its ubiquity of church buildings, it was also labelled this because it “implied ... a key facet of everyday life.”⁴⁶ As a large number of church buildings were positioned in the city’s centre, living in Torontonians society at this time meant that in some way, the church was involved—“by means of schools and hospitals, education and training, economic development, and church building, through the linking of Bible and plough, social and religious transformation would go hand in hand.”⁴⁷ There was great optimism for churches to continue their influence on society in the future of the city.

However, the boom of church buildings erected during the city’s formation could not be sustained. Social science professor Jon Caulfield remarks that the inner city’s shift towards industry during the late nineteenth century disrupted the church’s urban influence and marked the beginnings of its future decline.⁴⁸ Most of Toronto’s inner city church buildings had primarily served and were supported by the middle class. Because industry was driven by the working class, the inner city began to experience a change in its urban demographics. This demographic change caused by the rise of industry pushed the middle class out to the suburbs, prompting church congregations to follow.⁴⁹ The emerging working-class citizens, who were mainly immigrants of different religious backgrounds, were not as willing to participate in existing church life because “they were not able to meet the needs of [the newcomers] who found themselves outside the established social order.”⁵⁰ Between an increase in secularization, an increase in global immigration building a very different religious make-up in Toronto, and shifting settlement patterns among the original Christian denominations, church buildings began to disappear. The church congregations that remained in the inner city would need to change their ways to be able to withhold their relevance.

While secularization surely played its part in the dwindling of churches across Canada, Toronto’s church building boom of the late nineteenth century is also responsible for their decline in the 1960s. Architectural historian Jessica Mace asserts that this church building period produced an overabundance of church buildings in



Toronto Places of Worship

- + Christian
- + All other faiths
- Road centreline
- ▨ Toronto and East York Community Council Boundary
- Community Council Boundaries
- Neighbourhoods

⁴⁶ Caulfield, “The Growth of the Industrial City,” 12.

⁴⁷ Andrew Porter, “Church History, History of Christianity, Religious History: Some Reflections on British Missionary Enterprise since the Late Eighteenth Century,” *Church History* 71, no. 3 (2002): 583-584, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4146420>.

⁴⁸ Caulfield, “The Growth of the Industrial City,” 12.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 12-13.

⁵⁰ S.D. Clark, *Church and Sect in Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1948), 423, quoted in Caulfield, “The Growth of the Industrial City,” 15.

the city, which rendered them “essentially redundant from the outset.”⁵¹ Caulfield infers that Toronto’s enthusiasm for urban development, which was spurred by its new industrial growth, similarly prompted urban ecclesiastical development at this time.⁵² Toronto’s annexation of nearby lands prompted competing church denominations to take advantage of this opportunity to build more churches. Particularly aggressive in their building agendas were the Nonconformist churches—specifically Methodist—who rose in magnitude large enough to counter the Anglican’s previously dominant position. The resulting surge in Nonconformist followers created an optimism that promoted the rapid development of many more fair-sized church buildings in light of fulfilling the anticipated needs attributed by their newfound status, especially in those areas where no churches had yet existed.⁵³ However, these needs were not met, leaving many of them struggling in their finances and in their relevance.

In a time of so much social change, the church denominations that more clearly welcomed secular aspects of community service during this period were more likely to survive in the city. By changing how Christianity was practised and by attuning to the needs of the working class, many Toronto churches and organizations shifted their attention to serve their larger communities, not only their direct congregations. For example, “the Anglican Downtown Churchworkers’ Association ... oriented its work to such issues as recreation programs and charitable assistance for downtown children, relief aid during the Depression, and service work to the city’s immigrant communities.”⁵⁴ Rather than “seeking enhanced social respectability and building large, medievalist ... inner-city churches,” the Christian denominations and associated organizations, such as the Salvation Army, that reframed their position “grew and prospered.”⁵⁵ It was more important that they understood and responded to the needs presented by their communities rather than focusing solely on their religious stature.

Eventually, out of financial necessity, churches became motivated to “seek profit through multiple uses in order to sustain [themselves].”⁵⁶ Bathurst Street Methodist Church found their building saved by sharing it for uses in theatre and entertainment, which is how the building is still being used today after transferring full ownership to a theatre company in 1985.⁵⁷ The building’s original design, based on an amphitheatrical plan common in Nonconformist churches at

⁵¹ Jessica Mace, “Redundant since Construction: The Fate of Two Late-Nineteenth-Century Churches in Toronto,” in *Le Devenir Des Églises: Patrimonialisation Ou Disparition*, eds. Thomas Coomans and Jean-Sébastien Sauvé (Québec: Presses de l’Université du Québec, 2014), 137.

⁵² Caulfield, “The Growth of the Industrial City,” 13-14.

⁵³ Mace, “Redundant since Construction,” 120-121.

⁵⁴ Caulfield, “The Growth of the Industrial City,” 16.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶ Mace, “Redundant since Construction,” 126.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*



Fig. 2.5 Interior of former Bathurst Street Methodist Church, now known as the Randolph Theatre, in 2013.

this time, was well-suited to serving performance-based needs and only required minimal renovations to suit these needs more effectively.⁵⁸ Their church building was largely preserved through newfound social relevance via adaptive reuse.⁵⁹

In this drive to serve community, we may find clues into how struggling church buildings could be revitalized. Ultimately, use patterns suggest that Toronto's church buildings are in decline, both by population and financially. As social infrastructure, if they were to only serve their existing congregations, churches serve a significantly smaller number of people than they used to. This number becomes more extreme if taken as a percentage of the total population of Toronto. Toronto's aging buildings and aging congregations mean that there are less people to pay for the increasing costs of church building maintenance.

In redundancy and the clear need for change there is opportunity for the many underused churches in Toronto that occupy centrally located land, which is expensive to build on and maintain, to examine how they can better serve their communities for the future. The modern city has very few spaces that are completely free to enter. In the Canadian context, indoor spaces that can be used in all seasons, like libraries and community centres, become essential for maintaining a robust social infrastructure within the city. When church buildings face financial insecurity, a profit-focused decision-making model makes these buildings face two fates—either they are sold, or they are compromised. When church buildings are sold, they often change function completely, potentially transitioning into lofts or private businesses, which results in the loss of affordable public space in the city. When churches compromise to deal with financial hardship, they may reach out to other partners in order to share a minimally modified space not designed for sharing and flexibility. Band-aid solutions and complete loss of social infrastructure do not support the development of a populous city well. Maybe it is time to propose a more socially-minded initiative more aggressively.

A Changing City

Toronto's church buildings are a significant part of both the material and social history of the city. As such, many of Toronto's surviving churches are recognized through heritage protection, especially for the city's more notable constructions. However, since the decline of church buildings in the 1960s, Toronto's congregations have followed various trajectories of eventual change despite their buildings being heritage-protected. Many sites have been demolished because owners were not able to afford the maintenance costs associated with their age and did not find an owner willing to take on the associated maintenance challenges.

⁵⁸ Ibid, 127-128.

⁵⁹ Ibid, 138.

One example is Wychwood Davenport Presbyterian Church, which is set to be replaced by a midrise condo development. Despite its cultural, design, and contextual values that make it worthy of heritage designation,⁶⁰ no prospective owner had shown interest in saving the building. City councillor Josh Matlow states that “unless an owner is willing to repurpose [this] building [in disrepair]... it’s just going to continue to fall apart, and that’s not a reasonable option[.] ... Designation would give a false sense of preservation for that building.”⁶¹ Heritage designations only protect certain physical features of a building—exterior and/or interior—rather than their original usage or the various social, cultural, or economic affordances that they may provide. Heritage is concerned with physical preservation of the urban fabric and not with how the building may function within a neighbourhood’s social context—it can only advocate rather than dictate for a particular usage. This passive attitude may be favourable for heritage but troublesome for a continuously challenged social context. Is the city of Toronto willing to simply ‘see what happens’ when they let developers decide how to handle its church buildings’ futures? Will the city be happy with what social spaces remain or replace them?

In proposing the adaptation of a church building for extended survival, one may argue that doing so prolongs a potential future of disrespect toward Indigenous communities in Canada. Namely, that Christianity’s involvement during colonization would continue to impact current Indigenous communities through the preservation of its associated architecture. The trauma that Indigenous peoples have endured through the residential schools, which were fundamentally tied to church and government together, is intergenerational.⁶² This association means that, by extension, church buildings serve as a reminder of this trauma through its shared connotations. It is important to acknowledge that these buildings serve as strong symbols of both benevolent and malevolent pasts as we consider their adaptation and preservation. The churches of Canada have accordingly committed to addressing their historical wrongs as a response to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, asserting a multitude of ways that amends could be made.⁶³ As efforts by the provincial government of Ontario seek to uphold heritage church buildings through the Ontario Heritage Trust,⁶⁴ it is crucial that the buildings give back

⁶⁰ David Olsen, “Historic 83-Year-Old Wychwood Church Could Be Razed,” TRNTO (Post City Magazines, Inc., October 8, 2020), <https://trnto.com/wychwood-church-toronto-condo/>.

⁶¹ Olsen, “Historic 83-Year-Old Wychwood Church Could Be Razed.”

⁶² Geoffrey Carr, “Educating Memory: Regarding the Remnants of the Indian Residential School,” *JSSAC / JSÉAC* 34, no. 2 (2009): 87-88, <http://hdl.handle.net/10222/65349>.

⁶³ Fred Hiltz et al., “Response of the Churches to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada” (Ottawa: The United Church of Canada, June 2, 2015), <https://united-church.ca/sites/default/files/trc-churches-respond.pdf>.

⁶⁴ “Mandate of the Ontario Heritage Trust,” Ontario Heritage Trust, n.d.,

to the community in greater ways in order to make up for those previous historical wrongs. Would an adaptation that reappropriates a symbolic asset into one geared more towards community be enough to correct those wrongs? This is all to say that, as famously quoted by architect Lebbeus Woods, “architecture is a political act,”⁶⁵—and church architecture is especially charged.



Fig. 2.6 Historic 83-year-old Wychwood church scheduled for demolition.

<https://www.heritagetrust.on.ca/pages/about-us/our-mandate>.

⁶⁵ Lebbeus Woods, “Without Walls: An Interview with Lebbeus Woods,” interview by Geoff Manaugh, BLDGBLOG, October 3, 2007, <https://bldgblog.com/2007/10/without-walls-an-interview-with-lebbeus-woods/>



Fig. 2.7 Interior of the West40 lofts.

Patterns of Changing Church Buildings

Toronto's church buildings have changed in a multitude of ways across the city. The ways in which their heritage has been preserved alongside their building changes can be socially problematic in certain instances.

Church Lofts (Private/Introverted Change of Use)

One type of church adaptation that fails to address social agendas is the conversion of a church into a private residential dwelling, or church loft. In Toronto's current housing crisis, church condo conversions, such as the lofts at West40 (formerly St. Mary the Virgin Anglican Church) in Dovercourt Village,⁶⁶ frequently rent at high rates or sell for upwards of a million dollars or more. The heritage features provide the residential units with character; this strategy can be understood "as a means to differentiate the 'uniqueness' of locations and drive revenues" as mentioned by preservation architect Jorge-Otero Pailos.⁶⁷ Urban cultural geographer Nicholas Lynch claims that such a trend contributes to the "secular *embourgeoisement* of the central city" and "[helps] to produce terrains of exclusivity and gentrification,"⁶⁸ that is, the "transformation of local neighbourhoods into places that cater to specific, capital rich, residents."⁶⁹ While these buildings might sit vacant for decades without serving as a social infrastructure, there lies the issue of the commodification of a socially significant and publicly-accessible asset now serving only a privileged few. This kind of adaptation overlooks the potential communal affordances that are often associated with church buildings. Lynch concludes by suggesting that we should rather consider a "public future" for the "much needed community and public space in the inner city [of Toronto]."⁷⁰

⁶⁶ Karen Longwell, "This Is What a \$2 Million Loft inside a Converted Church Looks like in Toronto," BlogTO, March 20, 2021, <https://www.blogto.com/real-estate-toronto/2021/03/2m-40-westmoreland-ave-toronto-church-loft/>.

⁶⁷ Jorge Otero-Pailos, "Historic Provocation: Thinking Past Architecture and Preservation," *Future Anterior: Journal of Historic Preservation, History, Theory, and Criticism* 2, no. 2 (2005): vi, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25834968>.

⁶⁸ Nicholas Andrew Lynch, "Altared Places: The Reuse of Urban Churches as Loft Living in the Post-Secular and Post-Industrial City" (PhD diss., University of British Columbia, 2013), ii, <http://hdl.handle.net/2429/44176>.

⁶⁹ Lynch, "Altared Places," 125.

⁷⁰ Ibid.



Fig. 2.8 Exterior of All Saints Church-Community Centre captured in February 2022. ←

Fig. 2.9 Interior of All Saints Church-Community Centre during an annual holiday luncheon. →

A similar study exploring the role of church lofts in the gentrification of neighbourhoods asserts the potential sociocultural downside to these types of conversions, explaining that “when community-oriented heritage assets such as schools and churches are privatized, regardless of whether they are located in wealthier or lower-income neighbourhoods, they are no longer part of a shared local history relevant to all city residents across the socioeconomic spectrum.”⁷¹ Likewise to Lynch’s ending remarks, “finding new ways to promote heritage conservation while mitigating the associated element of exclusivity” is suggested to scholars studying heritage, adaptive reuse, and gentrification.⁷²

Minimal Church Adaptations (Temporary Compromise)

Congregations often wish to remain in place and continue serving their local communities in socially fruitful ways. Minimal interior renovations may be pursued to enable greater usage of their building, such as by freeing the rigidity of the sanctuary space through the removal of its original pews. All Saints Church-Community Centre in Moss Park is one example of a church that took such measures to address the growing needs within their community. Since the 1970s, the surrounding demographics of marginalized populations have influenced how the space has eventually been set up for use. Considering the increasing amount of unhoused and low-income people accessing their drop-in programs, the safe albeit tight space attends to many users in a variety of ways: tables, chairs, and a corner setup for preparing daily food and beverage allow people to eat drop-in meals on-site; computer workstations provide accessible internet browsing; a communal garden provides opportunities to learn and socialize outdoors; and their parking lot becomes a space for informal outdoor activities and barbeques. Weekly scheduling permits different user groups to use the space for functions such as worship and events such as holiday feasts. Over the years, the congregation partnered with the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC) to build an adjacent apartment building on its property; today, resources such as kitchen, administration, and office spaces are accessible to the church congregation, thereby permitting spatial flexibility and greater architectural integrity of the main sanctuary space.

However, this building and its governance are not without their own set of challenges. Because it is an old building, major renovation work is required before even minor changes to space use bring the building to a greater functional standard, which limits the array of user groups

⁷¹ Emma Abramowicz, “From Community Institution to Condo Conversion: Adaptive Reuse within Neighbourhood Gentrification in Cities in Ontario,” (MPlan major research paper, Ryerson University, May 25, 2021,) 43, <https://doi.org/10.32920/ryerson.14644659.v1>.

⁷² Abramowicz, “From Community Institution to Condo Conversion,” 46.



Fig. 2.10 All-Saints Church-Community Centre in typical usage.

willing to use such a space. Given that financial strain often burdens non-profit groups, church building upgrades are kept to a bare minimum so that money can be directed to carrying out their own services. A way to mitigate this financial strain is through the involvement of multiple non-profit groups in the sharing of the church building. However, this can become quite complicated logistically and result in administrative challenges—such as with ownership, scheduling, and cleaning—even when cooperative groups share the same space. When church congregations develop interest in attaining this mixed usage, these difficulties are often forethought, and thus attempts to intensify are held back. However, when the right partnerships, activities, and spaces are available and brought into alignment, beneficial outcomes for the community can result. These kinds of combinations create essential social infrastructures ideal for the wellbeing of their communities; All Saints Church Community-Centre is inspirational because they do a lot for their community with the little that they have. Imagining what church buildings could become through architectural intervention, community partnership, and financial investment can be a gateway to convincing cities of a shared community vision. This vision can gain even more traction when looking to precedent projects that have been *designed* to function better for the purposes of space sharing, reaching more members of the community, and future planning for flexibility.

Major Mixed-Use Church Redevelopments (Towards More Effective Usability)

Many churches are turning to mixed-use scenarios for the multiple benefits they present. Church congregations mitigate architectural and financial hardships by selling or leasing portions of their property to a prospective developer. The deal often involves the rehabilitation of the existing church building to be continued for religious use or involves its major renovation and adaptation for more functionality, such as multipurpose event spaces. Developers are usually interested in adding substantial residential density to make a profit, alleviate the costs associated with renovation and rehabilitation of the church building, and take advantage of its heritage character.

The United Church of Canada (UCC) has been considerably apt at this method of adaptation with their existing stock of church buildings. One example is Saint Luke's United Church in Moss Park, where a residential midrise component is planned to envelop the existing church building while providing the church and community with amenities such as a café and multipurpose community rooms. Over the last hundred years, the existing building had always been a community hub for the neighbourhood because of the availability of different types of spaces attached to the main sanctuary space. The spaces include a gymnasium, kitchens, and both small and large meeting rooms, all of which are



Fig. 2.11 Exterior rendering of the proposed redevelopment at Saint Luke's United Church.

rented at different rates and in an equitable manner—non-profits will usually pay less than for-profit groups for the same types of spaces. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, seventeen different organizations, including congregations, mental support groups, and theatre groups, had all been using the building. However, despite the intense community usage, it would be unsustainable for the church in the long run due to the lack of adequate and stable financial support and the impending complications of its aging structure. The costs needed to repair the church building for continued community use were becoming difficult to manage; its redevelopment would provide a recourse for solving these issues.

In a conversation with Reverend Jim Keenan of Saint Luke's, he identified how critical it is for the "congregation [to understand] that if they're going to survive and thrive and do the work that they've been called to do, they have to find their place in the local community and become an influencer."⁷³ In the early stages of planning, the congregation spoke with established neighbourhood organizations and coordinated with city officials to understand how the redevelopment could tie into larger communal goals.⁷⁴ The various neighbourhood wants that were gathered informed how the church could respond architecturally to better support those desires, which provided the church community with an opportunity to become more socially relevant through the redevelopment of its built form. This pre-planning and consultation also resulted in a more seamless rezoning application process, as both the city and community had seen the course of the project develop into one that they could all agree with.⁷⁵ The redevelopment includes the addition of one hundred affordable rental apartments and community spaces such as an outdoor plaza and a second floor terrace.⁷⁶ The existing sanctuary space is to be reconfigured to hold both a cultural meeting hall and a rentable venue space with catering capabilities.⁷⁷ The inclusion of the programs and spaces provided in the design proposal continue the essence of the church building as a community hub and is brought into greater usage and social relevance through its redevelopment.

Rethinking the Role of Religious Heritage

Redevelopment projects like Saint Luke's are gaining popularity across Canada. The UCC has taken a clear initiative through the recent creation of a company called Kindred Works, which manages and repurposes their existing land and church building assets "into housing and shared spaces

⁷³ Tobin Ng, "Forget Condos, These Churches Will Become Affordable Rental Units," Broadview, June 14, 2022, <https://broadview.org/kindred-works-united-church/>.

⁷⁴ From a conversation with Reverend Jim Keenan on October 14, 2022.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Ng, "Forget Condos."

⁷⁷ Ibid.

that are built to meet broad community needs and promote sustainability.”⁷⁸ Working with architects KPMB in the Saint Luke’s redevelopment, together they “[ensure that] the sense of community and social bonds that have always existed here live on in a new population of people” through their heritage church revitalizations.⁷⁹ Another Canadian company called Trinity Centres Foundation (TCF) similarly provides church congregations seeking newfound social relevance with consultancy towards creating community hubs. TCF founder and CEO Graham Singh admits that while “there is not a big financial upside on these [church revitalization into community hub] projects, ... there [is, however,] a massive social impact” because they foster social integration, thereby reducing “community disintegration” and resultant crime.⁸⁰ These kinds of organizations recognize the historical social role that church buildings had in many Canadian cities, promoting their revitalizations into outcomes that continue to drive their socio-cultural relevance forward. Imagining them as mixed-use adaptations additionally transforms them into places that are more socially, environmentally, and economically favourable than if left untouched.

The mixed-use redevelopment of Bloor Street United Church in the Annex similarly introduces new community spaces and the addition of large residential density. However, other than the street-facing facades of the church building, most of the original building has been demolished to better facilitate the new construction and addition of program. This facadist approach to redevelopment, which has become quite commonplace with heritage buildings in Toronto, tends to valorize the outward aesthetics of heritage rather than its inner social significance.⁸¹ Can facadist approaches be justified if the architecture being proposed is more equipped to be socially useful than what was existing? The question of how much to retain is a debatable discussion that needs to be evaluated in their specific scenarios. In this regard, the adaptation of existing heritage church buildings into community hubs serves as a socially fruitful compromise in preserving aspects of both their heritage and social significance.

Whether it is a large church denomination like the UCC or a single church congregation that owns a church building, if the finances are available to save their building, actions will be taken to keep it intact or to revitalize it into something more meaningful for the community. To say that Toronto’s church congregations have not acted towards

⁷⁸ “Our Way,” Kindred Works, n.d., <https://www.kindredworks.ca/our-way>.

⁷⁹ “Kindred Works,” KPMB, n.d., <https://www.kpmb.com/project/kindred-works/>.

⁸⁰ Grant Trahant, “Graham Singh // CEO of Trinity Centres Foundation,” May 21, 2021, in *Investing in Impact*, produced by Causeartist, podcast, MP3 audio, 48:06, <https://causeartist.com/this-organization-is-transforming-church-properties-into-modern-and-inclusive-community-hubs/>.

⁸¹ Zhen (Janet) Li, “Facadist Toronto: Heritage at Face Value,” (MArch thesis, University of Waterloo, 2023), 3, <http://hdl.handle.net/10012/19342>.



Fig. 2.12 Exterior rendering of proposed mixed-use redevelopment at Bloor Street United Church.

making positive change for their communities with their buildings would be untrue. But Toronto's pattern of urban development could influence decision-making towards more condominiums like city lofts, which are counter to the socio-cultural foundations of church buildings and to the growing social needs of the city. As people become less interested in practising Christian worship in the city's church buildings, their corresponding sanctuary spaces are increasingly pressured to become more useful for community needs as evident in a project like Saint Luke's. In redundancy and change, there is opportunity for churches and the city to reconsider how things have been done as they begin to prioritize for more social infrastructure.



Fig. 2.13 Bloor Street United Church being partially demolished for mixed-use redevelopment.



Fig. 2.14 Images of an interior rendering and ground floor plan of the proposed redevelopment at Saint Luke's United Church.

Towards Social Infrastructure

Social infrastructure refers to those places that determine whether fruitful social interactions and relationships can develop. As places of worship, church buildings are rightfully considered social infrastructure as they provide spaces and promote activities that help bring people together. Promoting change and uses that further a church building's function as social infrastructure is thus fundamentally appropriate, not only because it aligns with its historical function, but also because these kinds of spaces are good for the human condition.

Building social connections, and the spaces that support their formation, is especially important considering the multitude of crises impacting people's mental wellbeing today. Cities have begun to prioritize and integrate social infrastructure goals as part of their strategic city planning, especially after the negative social effects brought by the COVID-19 pandemic. During those times when strict stay-at-home measures were placed to curb the spread of the virus, most people endured periods of social isolation, which produced consequential negative effects on their overall mental health and wellbeing. People who had access to physical social interactions at home fared better than those who lived alone. It became clear that people need in-person social exchanges. To cope with the social mandates, people frequently sought ways to meet safely with one another in person as meeting online became socially draining. Whether it was within socially-distanced painted circles at the park, public spaces provided with adequate ventilation, or commercially-driven food establishments kept open as essential services, people refuelled their social battery through physical social infrastructure. We have gained a hard-won reminder that prioritizing one's mental health is just as important as protecting one's physical health, and that is partly fostered through social relationships. The pandemic demonstrated that virtual interactions are not capable of totally replacing our physical interactions without sacrificing our mental wellbeing. Although they served as band-aid solutions in times where physical interaction was not possible, they more importantly demonstrated that social sustainability cannot thrive without opportunities for physical meetings. Can we make church buildings into social infrastructure that is more commonplace, publicly accessible, and celebrated within our communities?

Understanding Social Infrastructure

The term 'social infrastructure' has gained popularity in recent years as a buzz-phrase in both academic and non-academic contexts. It is used cross-disciplinarily and at times haphazardly, so its interpretation and usage must be clarified within the context of this thesis.

While sociologist Eric Klinenberg has been thought to have popularized the discourse around social infrastructure, many different disciplines and stakeholders have since weighed in on this complex conversation. Former civil servant and author Caroline Slocock breaks down social infrastructure into three elements: 1) *buildings, facilities, and the built environment*, including mixed housing developments, community halls, and places to sit in public places; 2) *services and organizations*, such as those that provide access to lifelong learning, or accessible food outlets that sell healthy and affordable food; and 3) *strong and healthy communities*, which include place-based initiatives that work between organizations and sectors, and ownership of community assets.⁸² The definition presented here positions social infrastructure to embody a broad umbrella of categories related to places and things oriented towards communal well-being.

Public policy director Tom Kelsey and senior researcher Michael Kenny assert social infrastructure also includes "those physical spaces in which regular interactions are facilitated between and within the diverse sections of a community, and where meaningful relationships, new forms of trust and feelings of reciprocity are inculcated among local people."⁸³ The refinement of the definition is made by "focus[ing] on public facilities whose *principal* function is to foster inter and intra-communal relationships, alongside businesses which are designed to bring people together in a physical location while also pursuing commercial interests," such as youth centres or art galleries.⁸⁴ They also argue that these facilities contribute to "local feelings of identity and pride," considering that community bonds are developed in these places where community comes together.⁸⁵ Historic places, like church buildings, that give a sense of belonging to an area are considerably valuable in this regard, as they add to the cultural identity of their community.⁸⁶

⁸² Caroline Slocock, *Valuing Social Infrastructure* (London, UK: Community Links, 2018), 5-7, <http://www.civilexchange.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/Valuing-Social-Infrastructure-final.pdf>.

⁸³ Tom Kelsey and Michael Kenny, *Townscapes: The Value of Social Infrastructure* (Cambridge, UK: Bennett Institute for Public Policy, May 2021), 11, https://www.bennettinstitute.cam.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/Townscapes_The_value_of_infrastructure.pdf.

⁸⁴ Kelsey and Kenny, *Townscapes*, 11-12.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 12.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

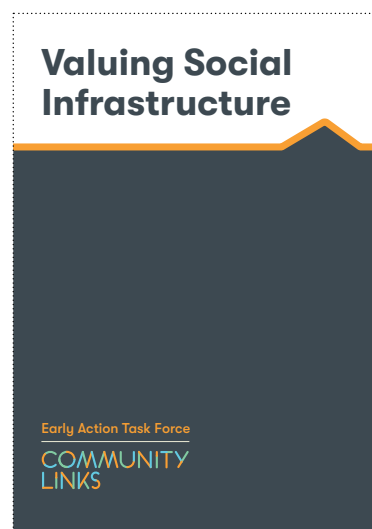


Fig. 2.15 Cover of *Valuing Social Infrastructure* report by Community Links' Early Action Task Force.

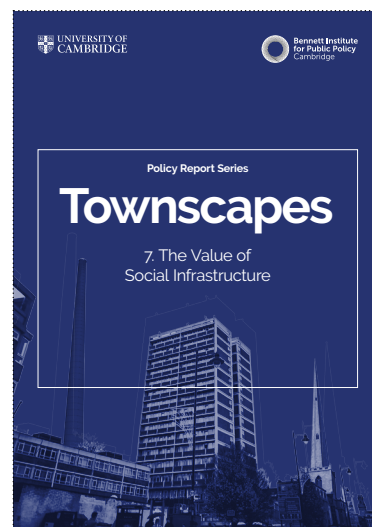


Fig. 2.16 Cover of *Townscapes: The Value of Social Infrastructure* report by the Bennett Institute for Public Policy.



Fig. 2.17 Cover of *Space for Community: Strengthening our Social Infrastructure* report by The British Academy and Power to Change.

Additionally, social infrastructure should not only account for purpose-built facilities, but also those *accidental* social spaces “which may be intended to serve a different purpose, but which nevertheless act as social infrastructure.”⁸⁷ Such ‘accidental’ spaces of social infrastructure would include supermarkets, versus community centres built for the purpose of community connection.⁸⁸

Finally, researchers Alan Latham and Jack Layton draw attention to the “*networks* of spaces, facilities, institutions, and groups that create affordances for social connection.”⁸⁹

This is all to say that social infrastructure is largely concerned with the welfare of the public and is provided by people in places meant for people. In cities, these concerns are of paramount importance. Considering the vast array of recent reports underscoring the relevance of understanding the complex nature of social infrastructure, this thesis focuses on how the revitalization of an existing built social infrastructure can intertwine with the initiatives and organizations that would make it especially valuable to a community. Furthermore, while this thesis focuses on creating purpose-built social infrastructures, it will also implement ‘accidental’ moments of sociability, as both are critical in producing social capital at different capacities. Studies into how church buildings can be transformed into more robust and public social infrastructures through specific and flexible design have not been extensive and is worth exploring.

Implementing Social Infrastructure

In Slocock’s report, a few key recommendations are made about the successful implementation of social infrastructure in cities. After first identifying that municipalities should allocate larger investment to social infrastructure, especially in deprived areas,⁹⁰ Slocock advises that the communities themselves “should have a say in what is most important to them when it comes to investing in or maintaining specific examples of social infrastructure.”⁹¹ Overall communal priorities can be ascertained the more frequently that community workshops, debates, and discussions are held, despite the differences in demographics, economic backgrounds, and cultural upbringings. Finally, she suggests “mapping existing social infrastructure and making better

⁸⁷ The British Academy, Power to Change, *Space for Community: Strengthening our Social Infrastructure* (London, UK, January 2023), 6, https://www.thebritishacademy.ac.uk/documents/4536/Space_for_community_strengthening_our_social_infrastructure_vSUYmgW.pdf.

⁸⁸ The British Academy and Power to Change, *Space for Community*, 10.

⁸⁹ Alan Latham and Jack Layton, “Social Infrastructure and the Public Life of Cities: Studying Urban Sociality and Public Spaces,” *Geography Compass* 13, no. 7 (2019): 3, <https://doi.org/10.1111/gec3.12444>.

⁹⁰ Slocock, *Valuing Social Infrastructure*, 3.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 8.



Fig. 2.18 St. John's Presbyterian Church in Riverdale, which currently stands in a state of disrepair.

use of the resources that already exist, developing strong collaborative partnerships with shared goals, empowering communities to determine priorities and take more control of assets and developing pooled budgets.”⁹² This would highlight those places where certain needs are already being met, which would inform how a revitalization could build upon these existing social infrastructures and provide something new and constructive to them.

Latham and Layton’s paper iterate the importance of social infrastructure and suggest six elements to their successful provision in cities: that they are *abundant, diverse, maintained, accessible, responsive, and democratic*.⁹³ These elements are generally provided through each instance of social infrastructure, although abundance and diversity are more related to the collection of them. Social infrastructure is at its best when all these elements are available and working in tandem. Before we can arrive at these qualities, Latham and Layton suggest “locating and understanding the spaces and facilities that are facilitating sociality and social connection—making sense of how the spaces and facilities work and exploring the social surplus that might be found in them. This involves recognising the specific value that can be found in spaces and facilities, understanding how and why they matter to the communities that use the space, and how we might understand them as social infrastructures.”⁹⁴ After positioning them, focus on their “material qualities... is central. ... The design, maintenance, distribution, and qualities of what is provided affects how social infrastructures function.”⁹⁵ These recommendations will be useful in the design of a church adaptation towards greater social infrastructure.

A City in Social Repair

Considering Toronto’s many church buildings, their established social background, and the need for social infrastructure, it is appropriate to see how those in disrepair may come to alignment with the city’s current social needs.

Today, a multitude of challenges test Toronto’s resilience as a functioning and liveable city. In response to its six most pressing issues—Equity, Climate & Environment, Civic Engagement, Communities & Neighbourhoods, Housing, and Mobility⁹⁶—the City of Toronto created three focus areas of Resilience Actions to combat them: People & Neighbourhoods, Infrastructure, and Leading a Resilient City.⁹⁷ Under the People & Neighbourhoods focus area, one

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Latham and Layton, “Social Infrastructure and the Public Life of Cities,” 8.

⁹⁴ Ibid, 9.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

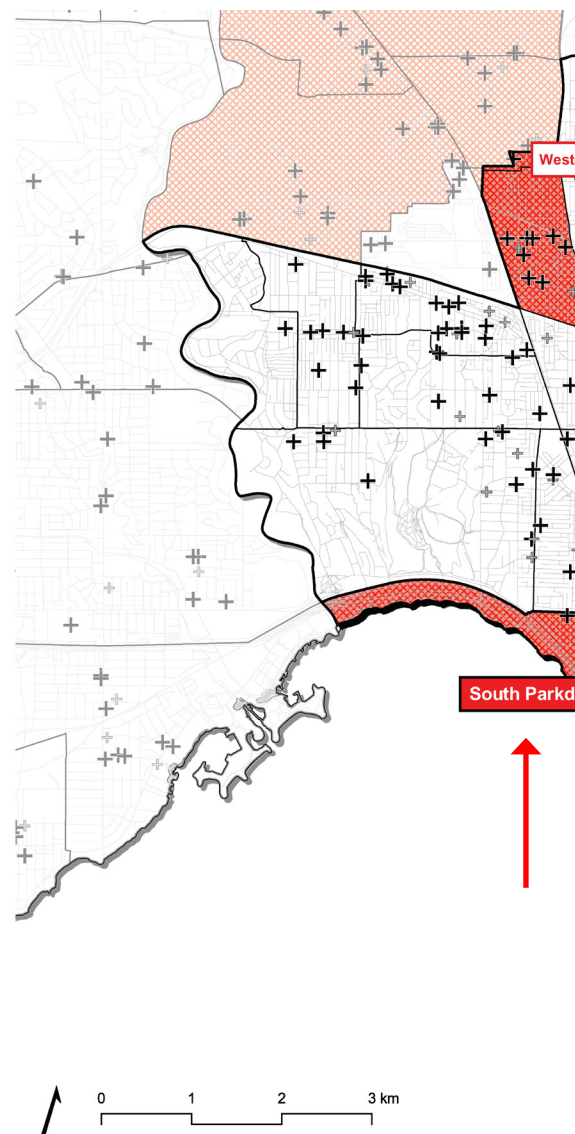
⁹⁶ “Toronto’s Resilience Challenges,” City of Toronto, accessed January 9, 2023, <https://www.toronto.ca/services-payments/water-environment/environmentally-friendly-city-initiatives/resilientto/torontos-resilience-challenges/>.

⁹⁷ “Resilience Actions,” City of Toronto, accessed January 9, 2023, <https://>

priority action is Neighbourhood Resilience, which aims to “enhance the capacity of neighbourhoods to prepare for and recover from shocks through grassroots action and network building.”⁹⁸ The adaptation of church buildings into more robust and relevant social infrastructures is well-suited to advancing this action.

In 2014, the City of Toronto released a report titled the Toronto Strong Neighbourhoods Strategy 2020 (TSNS 2020), which is an action plan created “for ensuring that each of [its] 140 neighbourhoods can succeed and thrive.”⁹⁹ Using five domains to measure neighbourhood well-being—Physical Surroundings, Economic Opportunities, Healthy Lives, Social Development, and Participation in Civic Decision-Making—a total of 31 neighbourhoods were identified as Neighbourhood Improvement Areas (NIAs).¹⁰⁰ Four of them fall within the Toronto and East York community council boundary—closely aligned with the original inner city of Toronto where the most of the city’s oldest church buildings are located. South Parkdale was initially selected due to a greater number of older church buildings relative to other NIAs, meaning redundancy is potentially more likely among them.

In the following chapters, this thesis will assess the established networks of social infrastructure and specific needs of the South Parkdale community and propose a design solution that repositions Bonar-Parkdale Presbyterian Church (BPPC) as building with a renewed capability to serve its community. To better serve community, today and tomorrow, is something that both the church congregation and the city can get behind.



www.toronto.ca/services-payments/water-environment/environmentally-friendly-city-initiatives/resilientto/resilience-actions/.

⁹⁸ “Resilience Actions,” City of Toronto.

⁹⁹ City of Toronto, *Toronto Strong Neighbourhoods Strategy 2020* (Toronto, ON: City of Toronto, 2017), 3, <https://www.toronto.ca/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/9112-TSNS2020actionplan-access-FINAL-s.pdf>.

¹⁰⁰ City of Toronto, *Toronto Strong Neighbourhoods Strategy 2020*, 9.

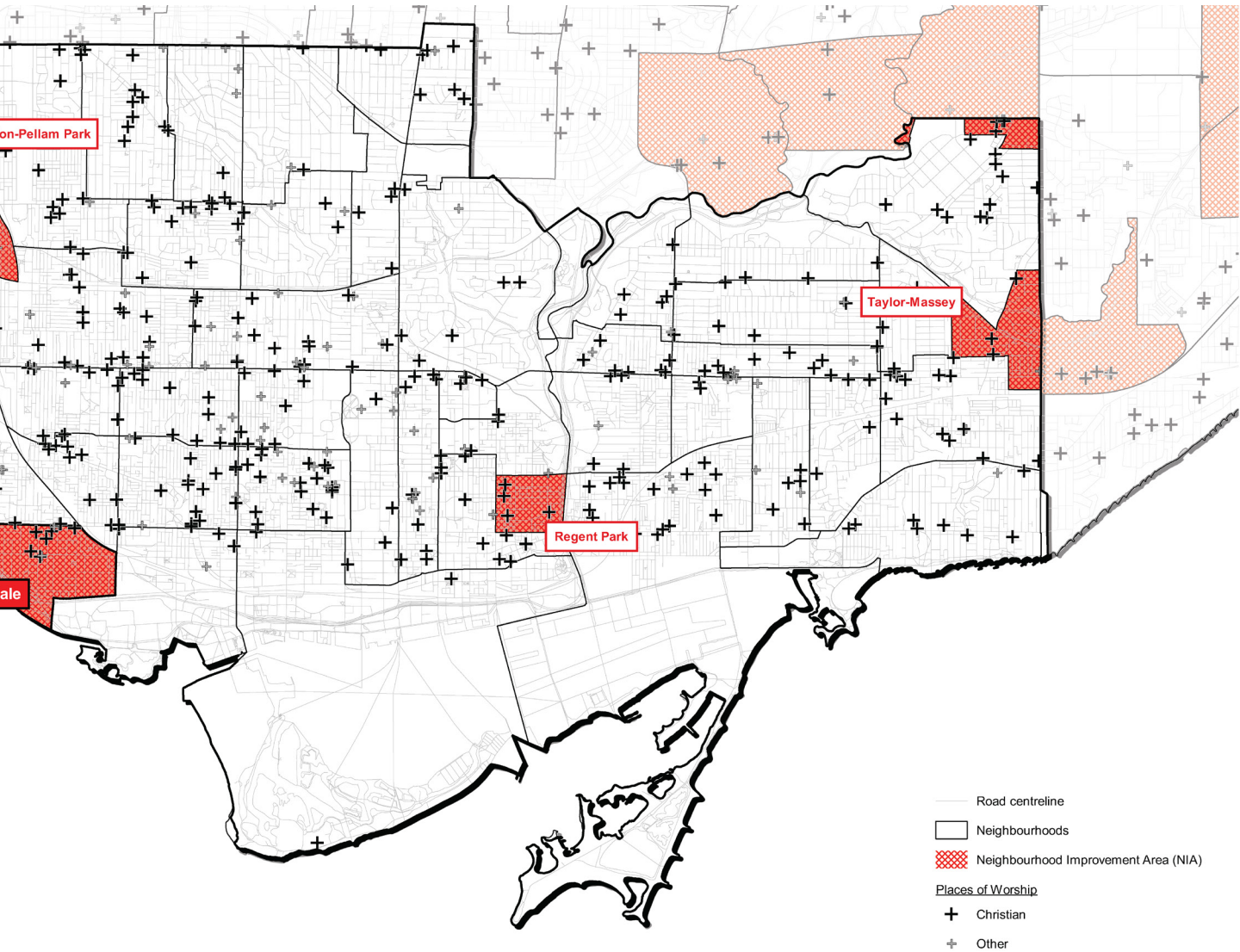


Fig. 2.19 Places of worship and Neighbourhood Improvement Areas (NIAs) within the Toronto and East York Community Council Boundary, with neighbourhood of study highlighted.

Neighbourhood Context:

South Parkdale



What do our surroundings tell us? ...

Tensions of Breaking and Building

“It is through a thorough knowledge and understanding of the existing condition that the architect or designer can uncover the meaning within a place, activate and therefore use it to instigate and liberate a new future.”¹⁰¹

- Sally Stone, *UnDoing Buildings*

South Parkdale is a neighbourhood in the southwest part of Toronto that has experienced a history of social strife and a growing need for social services. Beginning in the 1950s, working-class tenants were moving into the multi-unit dwellings of recently converted single-family homes that had once belonged to an affluent middle class.¹⁰² The construction of the Gardiner Expressway in the 1960s effectively cut off residents from easy access to Lake Ontario and prompted the construction of federally funded and affordable high-rise apartment buildings, which drove the middle class out of the neighbourhood and attracted low-income residents.¹⁰³ In the following two decades, province-wide deinstitutionalization caused an outflow of psychiatric patients in favour of “community based care.”¹⁰⁴ South Parkdale was disproportionately affected due to its proximity to two major psychiatric institutions and its lack of community support and sufficient housing.¹⁰⁵ This situation prompted more affordable housing options to appear, causing the re-emergence of middle-class citizens into the neighbourhood from the 1980s onward; artists had similarly followed, further catalyzing the neighbourhood’s gentrification and increasing social frictions between low-income people and middle-class families.¹⁰⁶ Gentrification continues to affect South Parkdale to this day.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰¹ Sally Stone, *UnDoing Buildings: Adaptive Reuse and Cultural Memory* (New York: Routledge, 2020), 19.

¹⁰² Tom Slater, *Toronto’s South Parkdale Neighbourhood: A Brief History of Development, Disinvestment, and Gentrification*, Centre for Urban and Community Studies Research Bulletin #28 (Toronto, ON: University of Toronto, 2005), 1-2, <http://neighbourhoodchange.ca/documents/2018/04/torontos-south-parkdale-gentrification.pdf>.

¹⁰³ Slater, *Toronto’s South Parkdale Neighbourhood*, 2.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 2-3.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 3-6.

¹⁰⁷ Kuni Kamizaki, *Parkdale Community Planning Study - Full Report* (Toronto, ON: Parkdale Community Economic Development (PCED) Planning Project, 2016), 16, <https://parkdalecommunityeconomies.files.wordpress.com>.

Fig. 3.1 Looking into H.O.P.E. Community Garden next to Masaryk-Cowan Community Centre with BPPC in the background. ←

PARKDALE 2018: A SNAPSHOT

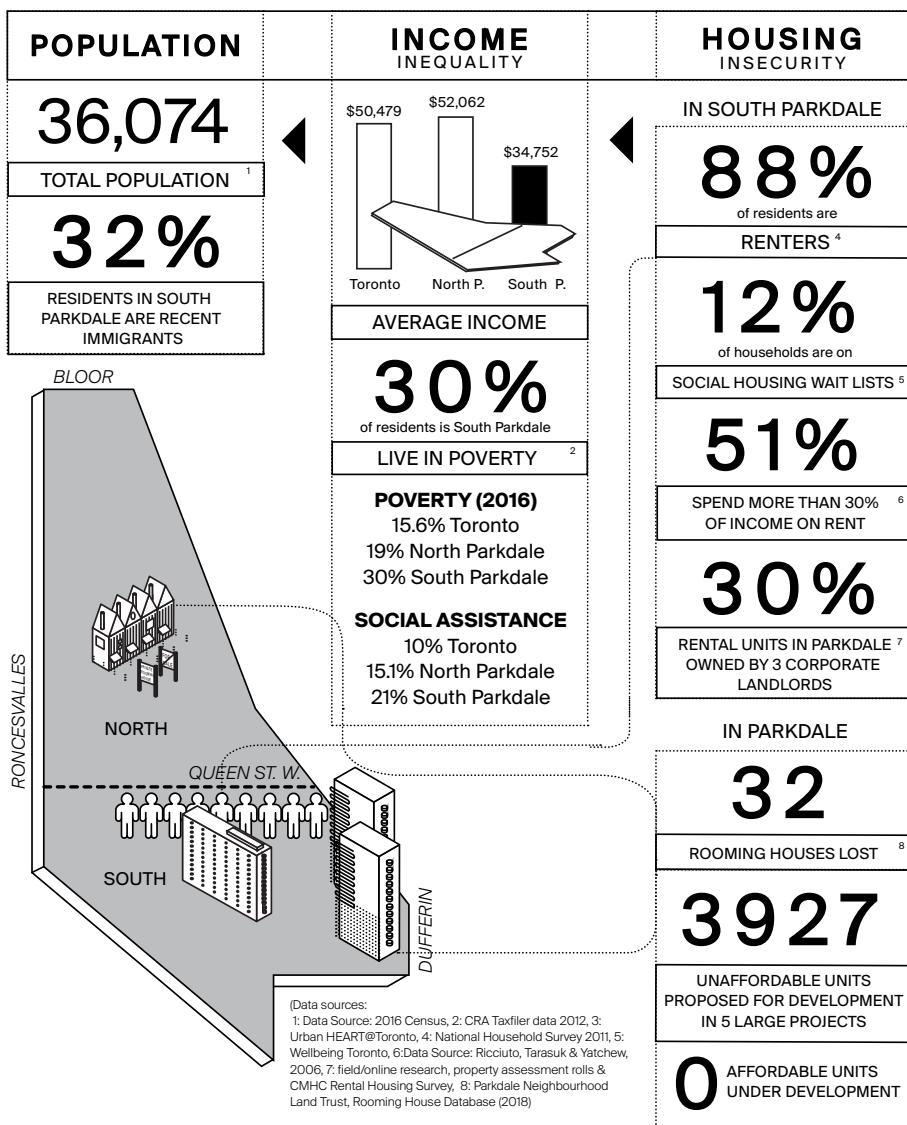


Fig. 3.2 South Parkdale is more heavily burdened with precarious individuals than North Parkdale is.

Parkdale's social tensions, caused by large-scale neighborhood transformations, also persist to this day. South Parkdale is more poverty-stricken than its northern counterpart and the rest of Toronto.¹⁰⁸ As reflected in Toronto's Neighbourhood Profile Data, the percentage of low-income measure, after tax (LIM-AT) measured 30.5 and 20.0 for South Parkdale and Roncesvalles, respectively; moreover, the percentage of unaffordable housing measured 49.2 for South Parkdale and 37.8 for Roncesvalles.¹⁰⁹ Its most vulnerable populations include equity-seeking communities, such as: working class and low-income individuals; Black, Indigenous, and racialized communities; newcomers; community members struggling with mental health issues; trans and nonbinary people; people living with disabilities; youth and seniors; lone parents and guardians; and formerly incarcerated people.¹¹⁰ A revitalized church building has the potential to positively impact the neighbourhood by continuing to serve a social mission within this mixed-demographic makeup. How can a revitalization project exercise care in a context of such social complexity?

I sought to understand South Parkdale's built environment and community through various methods, initially by exploring the neighbourhood in person, then through mapping, online research of community initiatives and stakeholders, and attending a community meeting about a new development being planned for the neighbourhood. These methods were encouraged by my research on social infrastructure and by the directions put forward by Reverend Jim Keenan and CEO of TCF Graham Singh, who have been part of successful community-oriented church building adaptations.

[com/2016/11/20161121_pced_final.pdf](https://www.toronto.ca/files/2016/11/20161121_pced_final.pdf).

¹⁰⁸ Kamizaki, *Parkdale Community Planning Study*, 14-20 and 35-36.

¹⁰⁹ City of Toronto, "Neighbourhood Profile Data," December 20, 2022, https://public.tableau.com/shared/TRFGFQC5R?:toolbar=n&:display_count=n&:origin=viz_share_link&:embed=y.

¹¹⁰ Parkdale People's Economy, *Parkdale Community Wealth Building - Full Report* (Toronto, ON: Parkdale Community Economic Development (PCED) Planning Project, 2019), 7, <http://parkdalepeopleseconomy.ca/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/Parkdale-Community-Wealth-Building-Report.pdf>.

The photographs depicted over the following pages tell a story of different economic struggles and community tensions, but also of hopeful opportunity. They range between South and North Parkdale, considering that public sentiments and behaviours often cross between soft neighbourhood boundaries such as in this case of the commercial Queen St W. The mix of unfavourable and favourable sentiments vocalized through the built environment helps paint a picture of various community needs.



Fig. 3.3 A residential fence at the intersection of O'Hara Ave and Maple Grove Ave in North Parkdale is tagged with mixed sentiments about Parkdale and/or its people. One obvious message reads "Parkdale is HOME."



Fig. 3.4 At the corner of Queen St W and Gwynne Ave., the entry door of a Middle Eastern restaurant door is shattered. The presence of a police vehicle suggests that the incident was recent.



Fig. 3.5 The windows to the Kabayan Multicultural Centre are barred. ↑



Fig. 3.6 A sleeping bag rests on a Toronto post-and-ring bike rack. Doors exiting from the Masaryk Cowan Community Centre are similarly barred. →



Fig. 3.7 A handwritten message on Noble St in North Parkdale prompts us to think about our relationships with strangers within our communities. ↑

Fig. 3.8 A mural spreading a message of positivity is painted on a garage door on Noble St. The mural had been painted during the COVID-19 pandemic. ←



Fig. 3.9 A poster campaign placed in front of a bike share on Noble St advocating for the philanthropic communities of Toronto to do more in addressing its urban inequalities.



Fig. 3.10 People wait in line to receive food donation boxes from the Parkdale Activity Recreation Centre (PARC) on Queen St W. The non-profit food rescue organization Second Harvest unloads their delivery.



Fig. 3.11 A fluorescent message on the non-profit artist-run centre Gallery 1313 reads, “[ART BUILDS SPACES AND] PLACES FOR EVERYONE.” ↑

Fig. 3.12 Other fluorescent messages that read “SEE ME” and “HEAR ME” were found along Queen St W near one of West Neighbourhood House’s six locations in Toronto. These messages were posted during the COVID-19 pandemic. →





Fig. 3.13 The Dunn Parkette Indigenous Garden.



Fig. 3.14 Colourful depictions of vegetables, plants, and insects painted on the wall adjacent to the Dunn Parkette Indigenous Garden.



Fig. 3.15 Masaryk Park with St. John's Polish National Catholic Cathedral in the background.



Fig. 3.16 Entry to H.O.P.E. Community Garden with the TCHC apartment building in the background.





Fig. 3.17 A series of art boards in the Dollarama parking lot depict Parkdale's vision for a community connected through food and culture. The pieces were done by the non-profit organization, Greenest City.



Fig. 3.18 One of the front entries to BPPC.

During my initial walk around South Parkdale, Bonar-Parkdale Presbyterian Church (BPPC) caught my attention—the paint of its entry doors was peeling, plastic buckets were hanging at the end of its entry stair railings, and the façade of its square tower read:

PARKDALE
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH
ERECTED A.D. 1886

I also found out that the church congregation had recently initiated a feasibility study with the TCF “for new ideas.”¹¹¹ These two conditions were enough to convince me that the church building faces disrepair and seeks revitalization. The following studies further uncover the social challenges and opportunities of the neighbourhood through its social infrastructure, where I also position BPPC in relation to them; the existing condition of the church building is more thoroughly explored in the following chapters.

¹¹¹ BONAR-PARKDALE PRESBYTERIAN, ON,” Trinity Centres Foundation, n.d., <https://trinitycentres.org/bonarparkdale>.

South Parkdale's Social Infrastructure

Social Infrastructure in the Built Environment

Since South Parkdale's designation as an NIA, actionable steps have already taken place to ensure that it indeed improves as a neighbourhood. This may be exemplified by the significant number of built social infrastructure facilities, including schools, community centres, and a library; indoor and outdoor recreational facilities; various places of worship (mostly churches); green spaces including parks, parkettes, and community gardens; a busy, commercial street consisting of cafes, restaurants, bars, and laundromats; and smaller facilities housing social services and non-profit groups. The schools in this area are often coupled with daycare services and considered de facto community centres. These institutional buildings are often great examples of urban social infrastructure because they are publicly funded and equipped well enough to facilitate community functions, with large and open spaces to anticipate opportunities for sociability.

Near BPPC is CreateTO's¹¹² proposed redevelopment project titled the Parkdale Hub, which brings several city-owned properties together into a community hub. These properties include the Parkdale Library and the Masaryk Community Centre, which will be integrated into a mixed-use scheme involving substantial residential components. Communal amenities such as the library and a community recreation centre will be expanded, along with multipurpose rooms for dance, fitness, and other communal functions.¹¹³ During CreateTO's Parkdale Hub Phase 3 Community Meeting, three relevant themes emerged: strong support for affordable housing; the clear potential for the Hub to respond to community needs; and the importance of addressing and reflecting local priorities in the design and management of the Hub.¹¹⁴ Specific community requests also came up during the meeting, including: an industrial kitchen for community programming; community spaces for selling food and produce; more senior programming; addition of green spaces; gardens and urban agriculture; an outdoor water activation feature for kids; and the use of mass timber.¹¹⁵ Through these conversations, the community's interest in the advancement and design of the Hub's future development is clear. Their priorities and specific desires are in place, which contribute to creating a strong social infrastructure for the neighbourhood.

Legend

- institutional
- recreational
- religious
- green spaces
- commercial
- social services / non-profit

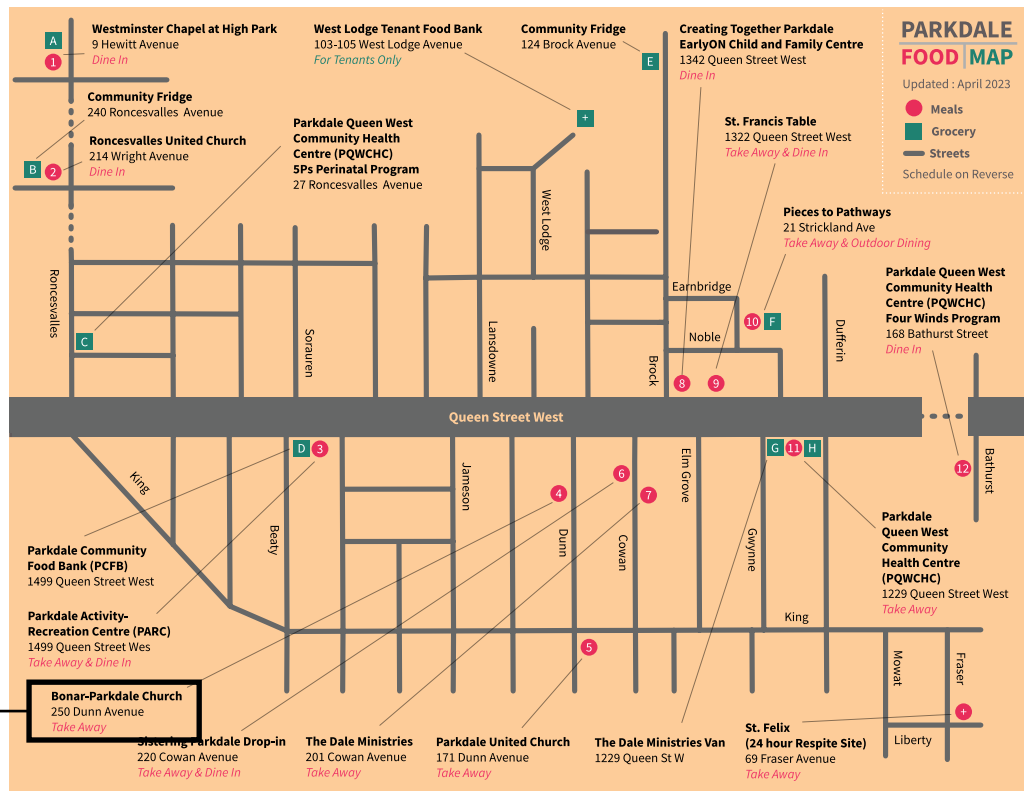
Fig. 3.19 Different varieties of social infrastructure surround BPPC. ←

¹¹² CreateTO is a real-estate agency established by the City of Toronto.

¹¹³ CreateTO, "Parkdale Hub – Community Consultation Meeting," March 8, 2023, https://www.dropbox.com/s/k6vq3j1gdco7531/2023-03-08-Community%20Meeting_FINAL%20TO%20PRESENT.pdf?dl=0.

¹¹⁴ CreateTO, "Parkdale Hub – Phase 3 Community Meeting Summary," April 2023, 2, <https://createto.wpenginepowered.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/Parkdale-Hub-Phase-3-Community-Meeting-Summary.pdf>.

¹¹⁵ CreateTO, "Parkdale Hub – Phase 3 Community Meeting Summary," 4-10.



MEALS	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT	SUN
1 Westminster Chapel 9 Hewitt Avenue						9 AM (Last Saturday)	call to sign up 416-466-8819 x 300
2 Roncesvalles United Church 214 Wright Avenue							1 - 3 PM
3 PARC 1499 Queen Street West	9:30 - 10:30 AM 10:30 AM - 1 PM	9:30 - 10:30 AM 10:30 AM - 1 PM	9:30 - 10:30 AM 10:30 AM - 1 PM	9:30 - 10:30 AM 10:30 AM - 1 PM	1 - 3 PM	11:30 AM - 12:30 PM 12:30 - 2 PM	11:30 AM - 12:30 PM 12:30 - 2 PM
4 Bonar-Parkdale Church 250 Dunn Avenue							3 - 5 PM (3rd Saturday)
5 Parkdale United Church 171 Dunn Avenue		6 PM (3rd Tuesday)					
6 Sistering Drop-in 220 Cowan Avenue	12 PM	12 PM	12 PM	12 PM	12 PM		
7 The Dale Ministries 201 Cowan Avenue	1 PM			10 AM			
8 Creating Together Parkdale 1342 Queen Street West	11 - 11:30 AM ¹	11 - 11:30 AM ¹	11 - 11:30 AM ¹	11 - 11:30 AM ¹	11 - 11:30 AM ¹	11:30 AM - 12 PM ¹ (Twice a month)	¹ for families with 0-6 year olds
9 St. Francis Table 1322 Queen Street West	12 - 1 PM	12 - 1 PM 4:30 - 6 PM	12 - 1 PM 4:30 - 6 PM	12 - 1 PM 4:30 - 6 PM	12 - 1 PM		
10 Pieces to Pathways 21 Strickland Avenue				5 - 7 PM ² (Biweekly till June 1)			² for Queer & Trans Youth (16-29 years old)
11 PQWCHC 1229 Queen Street West	Morning						
12 PQWCHC Four Winds Program 168 Bathurst Street					9:30 AM ³ 12:30 PM ³		³ for Indigenous program members
GROCERY	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT	SUN
A Westminster Chapel 9 Hewitt Avenue						10 AM - 12 PM	
D PCFB 1499 Queen Street West			11:00AM - 3:00PM	11:00AM - 3:00PM	10:30AM - 1:30PM ⁴	10:00AM - 12:30PM 12:30PM - 2:00PM	⁴ for Seniors & Disabled
G The Dale Ministries Van 1229 Queen St W			1 - 2 PM (Snacks only)				
F Pieces to Pathways 21 Strickland Avenue				5 - 7 PM ⁵ (Biweekly till June 1)			⁵ for Queer & Trans Youth (16-29 years old)
C PQWCHC SPs Perinatal Program 27 Roncesvalles Avenue							⁶ for SPs Perinatal Program members

Community Fridges Open 24/7

B 240 Roncesvalles Avenue

E 124 Brock Avenue

H 1229 Queen Street West

Fig. 3.20 The Parkdale Food Map helps community members find accessible food resources.

Social Infrastructure in Community Initiatives

Before South Parkdale’s designation as an NIA, the community had already developed initiatives to combat neighbourhood change due to gentrification. The major community concern in South Parkdale at this time was related to how gentrification had been impacting food security.¹¹⁶ Since then, various community initiatives and reports have spurred the community to work toward keeping South Parkdale a diverse, affordable, and accessible place to live for its most vulnerable members.¹¹⁷ The most notable initiatives include: the Parkdale Neighbourhood Land Trust (PNLT), “Toronto’s first community land trust that aims to acquire and hold land for community benefits”¹¹⁸; the Parkdale Food Network (PFN), a network of organizations “[working] to enhance further coordination and collaboration of community food security responses at the neighbourhood level”¹¹⁹; and the Co-op Cred Program, which “combines an alternative currency with supportive work placements for low-income and marginalized people.”¹²⁰ Three major reports authored by the Parkdale People’s Economy (PPE)—*Parkdale Community Planning Study*, *Parkdale Community Benefits Framework*, and *Parkdale Community Wealth Building*¹²¹—are testaments to the successful collaborations and the commitment to creating a shared vision of Parkdale.

The one initiative that BPPC is clearly a part of is the PFN. Alongside eleven other organizations, BPPC supports the community by providing a takeaway meal every third Saturday of the month. The public Parkdale Food Map shows the network of accessible food resources and programs made available to vulnerable community members in various forms:

- The Parkdale Activity Recreation Centre (PARC) provides hot meals every day of the week, alongside a variety of social, recreational, and health services.
- The Parkdale Community Food Bank (PCFB) is the most prominent food provider to anyone who needs it. This food bank allows its users to select their own food items, which gives them a greater sense of dignity.
- Several churches and non-profit organizations provide free hot meals over different days of the week, minimizing the burden on any single one by sharing priorities.
- Three community fridges are open and accessible 24/7.
- Just outside the neighbourhood is a seed library, where people can pick up or drop off seeds and learn about urban agriculture.

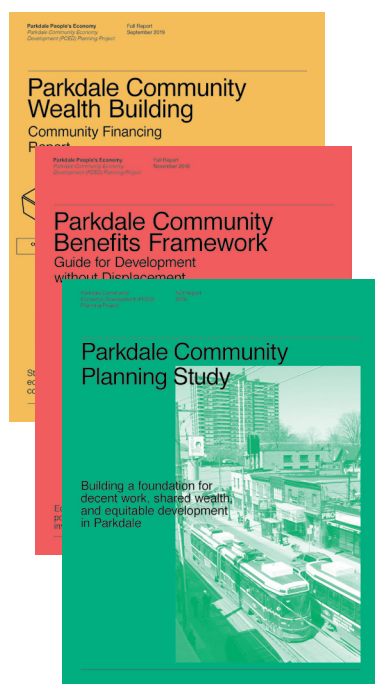


Fig. 3.21 Several of the community reports published by PPE.

¹¹⁶ Kamizaki, *Parkdale Community Planning Study*, 16.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 5.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 45.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 8.

¹²¹ “Welcome to Parkdale People’s Economy,” Parkdale People’s Economy, n.d., <https://parkdalepeopleseconomy.ca/>.

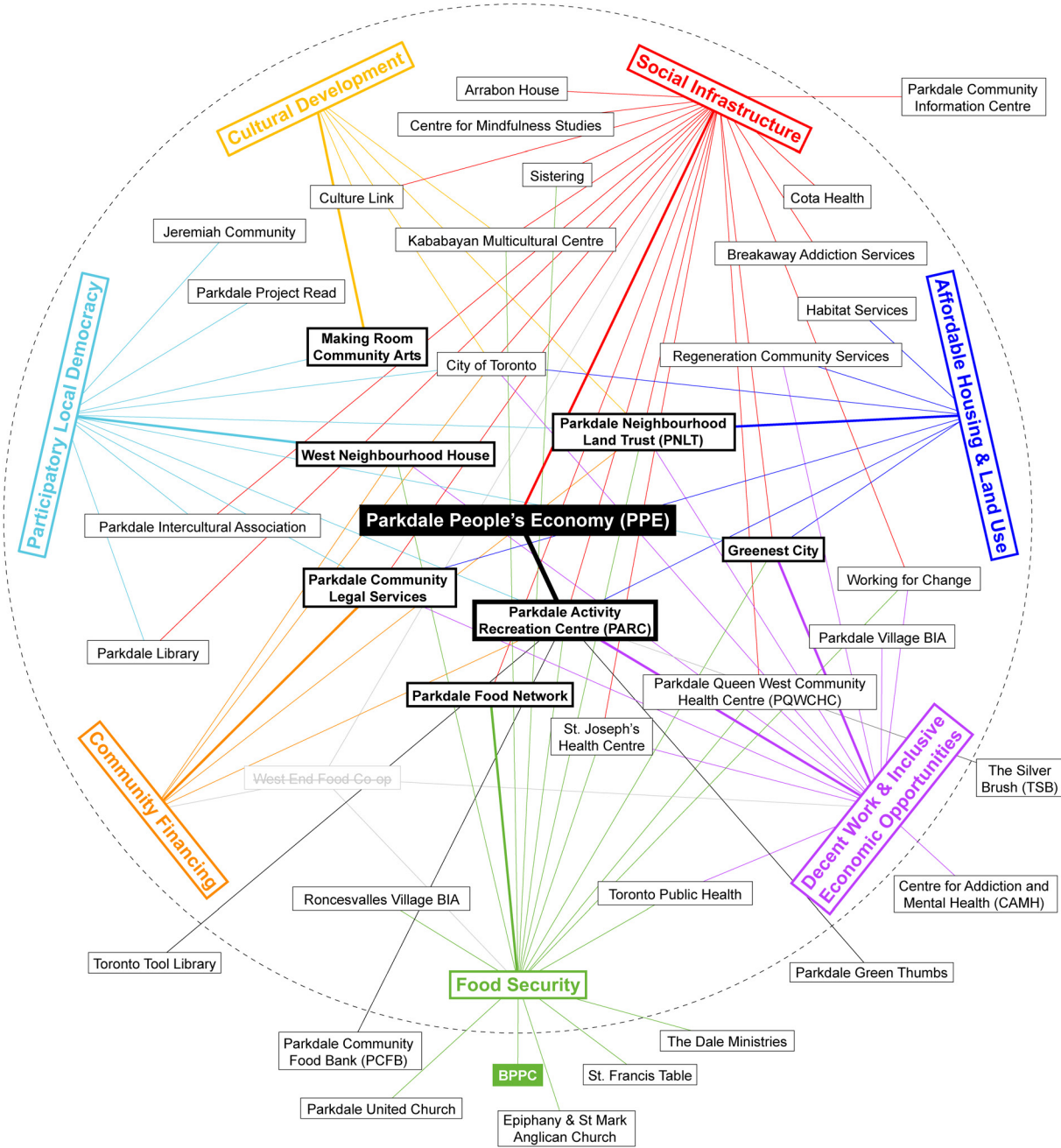


Fig. 3.22 The network of community organizations working towards the seven areas for community action and policy options established for South Parkdale.*

The PFN is one example of how the commitment and coordination of multiple organizations builds a network of essential communal resources. How can BPPC present additional opportunities for social care?

Social Infrastructure in Community Organizations

PPE, previously known as the Parkdale Community Economic Development (PCED) Planning Project, is the collective group of thirty organizations behind the various community planning initiatives and reports. Many of the organizations are non-profit and local to the neighbourhood, whereas some are municipal and/or have multiple locations across Toronto. Led by PARC, PPE developed the first comprehensive neighbourhood action plan in 2016 through the *Parkdale Community Planning Study* report. Guided by the four overarching values of diversity, affordability, inclusion, and equity,¹²² seven key areas¹²³ were identified as priorities for community action and policy options: *social infrastructure; affordable housing and land use; decent work and inclusive economic opportunities; food security; community financing; participatory local democracy; and cultural development.*¹²⁴

The diagram to the left illustrates the network of organizations directly involved in PPE, as well as those that support PPE (placed outside the circle), in relation to the seven priority action areas.¹²⁵ The associations were derived from the three reports previously mentioned, showing connections between organizations and action areas if the organization was mentioned under the action area breakdown. The organizations marked in bold have been delegated to lead certain action areas; for example, the *decent work and inclusive economic opportunities* action area happens to be led by both PARC and Greenest City. This assemblage highlights the commitment of many organizations to cooperate under one shared neighbourhood vision for South Parkdale.

Although BPPC is not directly a part of PPE, they address the *food security* action area through its meal program. BPPC has potential to better address its community goals through its building's revitalization and adaptation.

¹²² Kamizaki, *Parkdale Community Planning Study*, 5.

¹²³ The two more recent reports published by PPE—*Parkdale Community Benefits Framework* in 2018 and *Parkdale Community Wealth Building* in 2019—both mention two additional key action areas: *community health* and *interfaith*. These areas are work-in-progress, as neither are expanded upon in the reports nor on PPE's website. See Parkdale People's Economy, *Parkdale Community Benefits Framework* (Toronto, ON: Parkdale Community Economic Development (PCED) Planning Project, 2018), 12, <https://parkdalecommunityeconomies.files.wordpress.com/2018/11/parkdale-community-benefits-framework1.pdf>, and Parkdale People's Economy, *Parkdale Community Wealth Building*, 8.

¹²⁴ Kamizaki, *Parkdale Community Planning Study*, 24-25.

¹²⁵ While best efforts have been made to include most of the organizations involved, many may be missing from the picture. Some organizations may additionally be involved in other action areas.

*The colours used here do not correlate with the previous mapping of social infrastructure surrounding BPPC.

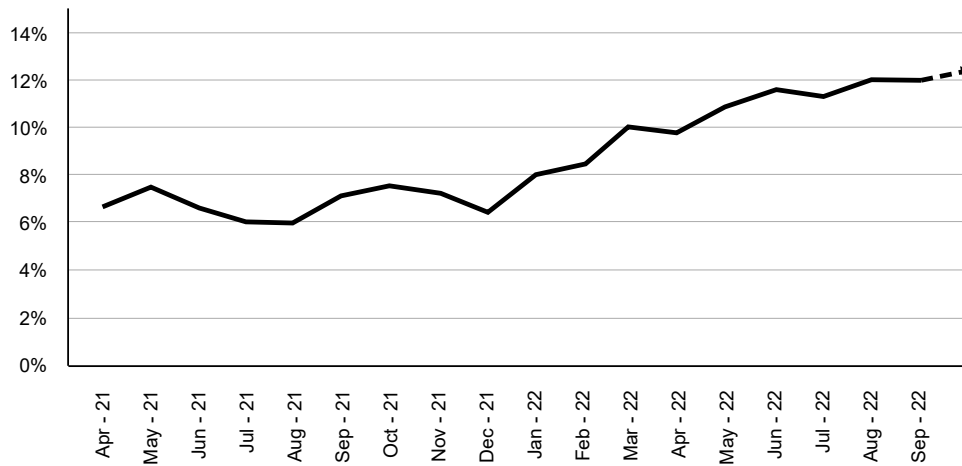


Fig. 3.23 Client visits to Daily Bread by month from January 2014 to September 2022. ↑

Fig. 3.24 Recent growth in new Daily Bread clients (new clients as a percentage of all clients). ↓

Reflections on South Parkdale's Social Infrastructure

South Parkdale's social infrastructure has shown to be strong at all three levels: its built environment is diverse and abundant; its community initiatives are varied; and its community organizations are active and well connected. The community meeting about the new Parkdale Hub development has shown that BPPC could build upon and implement community priorities that were not guaranteed to be implemented in the design of the Hub.¹²⁶ How can the adaptation of BPPC fit more closely into South Parkdale's shared communal vision?

Food Insecurity

Toronto's food insecurity has grown considerably in recent years. Exacerbated by the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, such as unemployment and inflation, citizens rely more heavily on food banks due to increasing prices of regular grocery store items. In the annual *Who's Hungry* report, Daily Bread Food Bank and North York Harvest Food Bank have seen a record number of 1.68 million visits from April 2021 to March 2022,¹²⁷ and projected that food bank visits would surpass two million in 2022.¹²⁸ Among the people visiting, an increasing number include clients that are employed, relatively young, and new to Canada.¹²⁹ Thirty-eight percent of food bank users relied on social assistance as their primary means of income and one-third were employed.¹³⁰ These trends signify a growing pervasiveness of food insecurity, even among working-class citizens in Toronto. The report further outlined that "those with disabilities, racialized people, newcomers, and people with precarious immigration statuses ... [are] groups that faced elevated rates and severity of food insecurity. These groups face structural oppressions ... that result in inequitable access to wealth and other resources ... [that] keep individuals in poverty and increase their likelihood of experiencing food insecurity."¹³¹ These groups of individuals are commonly found in South Parkdale, which brings no surprise as to why the neighbourhood is keen on supporting them.

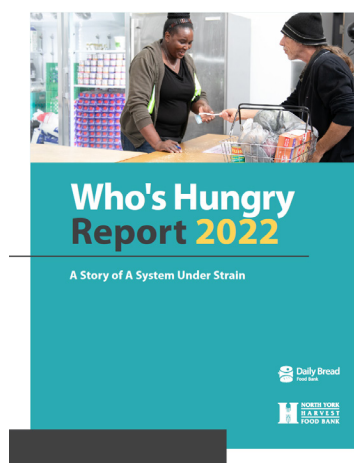


Fig. 3.25 Cover of *Who's Hungry Report 2022* published by Daily Bread Food Bank and North York Harvest Food Bank.

¹²⁶ Many instances within the Parkdale Hub meeting summary used phrases such as 'potential for' and 'consideration of' community concerns and suggestions. See CreateTO, "Parkdale Hub – Phase 3 Community Meeting Summary," 2.

¹²⁷ Benjamin Nothwehr, Omar Akeileh, and Diane Dyson, *Who's Hungry Report 2022: A Story of A System Under Strain* (Toronto, ON: Daily Bread Food Bank and North York Harvest Food Bank, 2022), 6, <https://www.dailybread.ca/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/DB-WhosHungryReport-2022-Digital-1.pdf>.

¹²⁸ Nothwehr, Akeileh, and Dyson, *Who's Hungry Report 2022*, 11.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, 6.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, 8.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, 6.

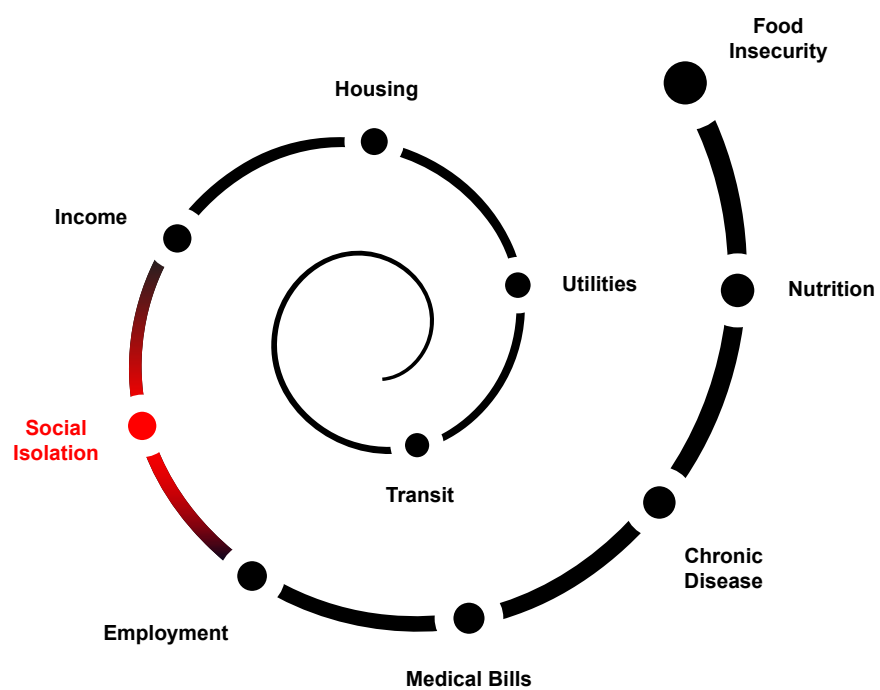


Fig. 3.26 Food insecurity can lead to a downward spiral of further crises--social isolation may also be considered as one.

There is great cause for concern with food insecurity when it comes to overall health and wellbeing. According to the *Who's Hungry* report, food insecure people “are at a greater risk of developing chronic health conditions such as mental health disorders, cardiovascular disease, diabetes, and infections” and are more prone to greater illness and possibly premature death as they are less able to afford to take care of themselves.¹³² In addition, most food bank users experience negative feelings of depression, stress, and anxiety.¹³³ These social stressors put food bank users in much greater need of social support. The report further noted that those in poverty, who are also most likely to be food insecure, “often lack vital social connections and capital, with social isolation contributing to and being a consequence of living in poverty.”¹³⁴ How can these social supports become more mainstream, and how can this be addressed through BPPC’s building adaptation? With there already being a food bank in South Parkdale, would the neighbourhood benefit from another one, or is there a more appropriate alternative?

Food Co-ops

A food co-op model fits well into the potential programming of this thesis project as it is concerned with food security and building communities around food. Food co-ops provide an opportunity for people “to be a part of something”¹³⁵ by being locally driven, neighbourhood-oriented, more affordable than typical grocery stores, and by providing volunteering opportunities.

Toronto was once home to four food co-ops; two have closed in recent years. The West End Food Co-op (WEFC), was a much-loved food co-op that existed in South Parkdale for a decade until late 2019.¹³⁶ Despite the closing of their physical location, they continued to run a year-round farmers’ market in partnership with PARC and “a co-op cred program in which low-income and marginalized residents [were] given on-the-job training in exchange for credit to purchase food at the popular farmers’ market.”¹³⁷ In addition, WEFC brought community-based food literacy and skills development workshops to Parkdale, providing opportunities to learn and socialize between members of the community.

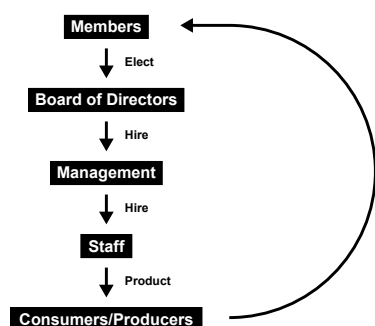


Fig. 3.27 Food co-ops are co-owned by members of the community.



Fig. 3.28 Previous store frontage of West End Food Co-op on Queen St W in 2018.

¹³² Ibid, 14.

¹³³ Ibid.

¹³⁴ The stigma associated with being poor also deepens feelings of loneliness, shame, and alienation from society. See Nothwehr, Akeileh, and Dyson, *Who's Hungry Report 2022*, 15.

¹³⁵ Karon Liu, “How these Toronto food co-ops built sustainable models for community-minded shopping,” *Toronto Star* (Toronto, ON) Jul. 24, 2018. <https://www.thestar.com/life/2018/07/24/building-a-sustainable-model-for-a-food-co-op-in-toronto.html>.

¹³⁶ Parkdale People’s Economy, *Parkdale Community Wealth Building*, 23.

¹³⁷ Liu, “Toronto food co-ops.”

Given the meaningful attributes of food co-ops for vulnerable populations—through the affordability of food items, educational workshops, job opportunities, and social encounters—it would be beneficial to see one revived within South Parkdale. It is also meaningful because local members curate the inventory of food items sold, so it is likely that items will be ethnically aligned with the diverse cultures of the community. Re-introducing a food co-op into the neighbourhood would be socially relevant and would make for an encouraging proposition in BPPC's reprogramming.

A Neighbourhood of Challenges and Opportunities

With so many community advocates and neighbourhood-wide strategies working toward making South Parkdale socially robust, the adaptation of BPPC is conveniently situated within an ideal scenario—it is abundantly supplied with a diverse range of social infrastructure in its built environment, community organizations, and community initiatives, and has a population demographic that would benefit from more social support and physical infrastructure. By incorporating existing initiatives and community stakeholders into the revival of BPPC, this thesis will capitalize on the momentum already in place.



Fig. 3.29 Looking into H.O.P.E. Community Garden next to Masaryk-Cowan Community Centre with BPPC in the background.

Building Context:

Bonar-Parkdale Presbyterian Church



What does the building tell us? ...

A Building Can Be a Double-Edged Sword

“It is safe to say that the church is today nowhere near the heart of contemporary urban culture. Rather, it has been relegated to being an awkward outlier, often a space now barely inhabited or used, expensive to maintain, a liability.”¹³⁸

- Edwin Heathcote, The Financial Times

Since the inception of Bonar-Parkdale Presbyterian Church (BPPC), the building has endured multiple transformations to meet the changing needs of its community and its patrons. It was constructed in 1886 to replace a smaller parish church already existing on site and meet the anticipated needs of a growing congregation. In 1899, a Sunday School was added to the back of the church building, and in 1910, an Institute Building was added to further accommodate the needs of the scholars using the buildings. The property remained this way for decades before seeing further change.

Around 1988, the congregation decided to demolish these previous additions in favour of a residence for low-income seniors as well as ancillary spaces for the church to better respond to the needs of the neighbourhood at the time. In 1992, the residential part of the property was leased to a non-profit housing corporation for forty years,¹³⁹ providing seventy-two affordable housing units in the six-storey building known as Bonar Parkdale Place (BPP). The ground floor includes several services and shared spaces for the residents, including a mail room, shared laundry, washrooms, administrative rooms, and a seniors recreation room, while the basement accommodates parking and other service rooms needed to operate the building. The BPP addition incorporates rooms and services for the congregation by allocating them space on half of the ground floor, separated by an internal door and distinct entrances. The added spaces for the congregation include rooms dedicated to church usage, such as a vestry and a church office; several meeting rooms also used for learning and practising music; a few storage rooms; a multipurpose ‘Friendship’ hall fitted with a stage; and a

¹³⁸ Edwin Heathcote, “In Praise of New Sacred Buildings,” The Financial Times, March 2, 2020, <https://www.ft.com/content/6f1d42c0-5c73-11ea-8033-fa40a0d65a98>.

¹³⁹ From a conversation with BPPC building manager on November 26, 2022.

Fig. 4.1 Looking up from the street-facing facade of BPPC. ←

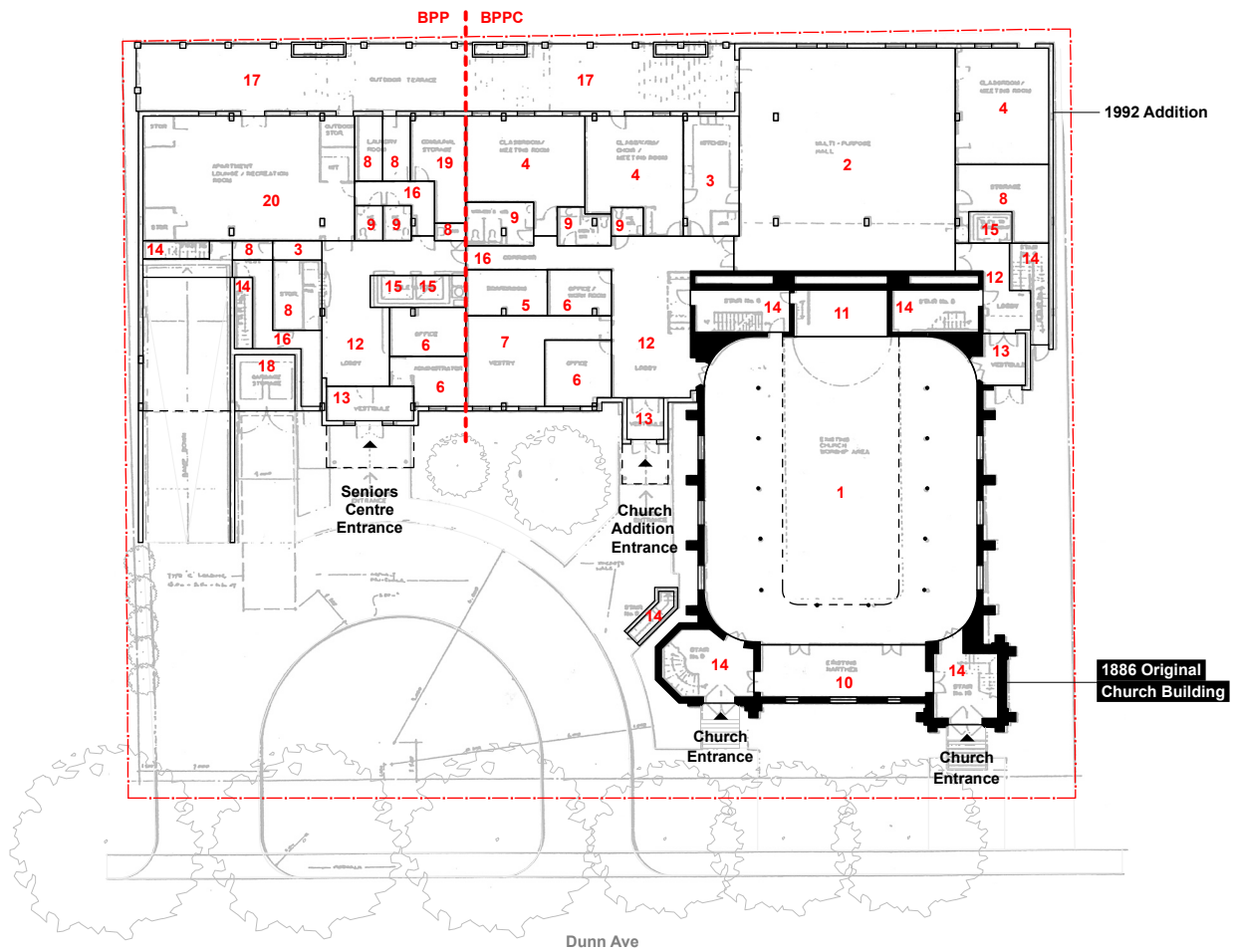


Fig. 4.2 BPPC circa late 1880s. ←

Fig. 4.3 BPPC with the addition of the Institute Building visible, circa 1914. ↓



Fig. 4.4 Street view of BPPC and the BPP seniors' addition today.



- | | |
|--------------------------|-----------------------------|
| 1 Sanctuary | 11 Organ room |
| 2 Multipurpose hall | 12 Lobby |
| 3 Kitchen | 13 Vestibule |
| 4 Classroom/meeting room | 14 Stair |
| 5 Boardroom | 15 Elevator |
| 6 Office | 16 Corridor |
| 7 Vestry | 17 Outdoor terrace |
| 8 Storage | 18 Garbage storage |
| 9 Washroom | 19 Senior's laundry |
| 10 Narthex | 20 Senior's recreation room |

small kitchen that opens to the multipurpose hall. All in all, the BPP addition has provided the church congregation, the vulnerable senior residents, as well as the larger community of Parkdale, with supportive communal spaces.

The additional floor space added to the church building serves both the church congregation and the community in a variety of ways. Spaces are offered to the community to rent, which provides the church with helpful, although irregular, income. Their most financially lucrative space is the multipurpose hall, especially when rented regularly. The community uses the multipurpose hall the most frequently, for it is the largest and therefore most socially conducive of all the spaces. It is open enough to facilitate various arrangements of tables and chairs as needed, with access to an outdoor terrace and a kitchen with an accessible serving hatch. Small performances, private birthday events, and large Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) meetings all take place in the hall; it is also used as a voting place during national elections and for social activities by other churches in the community.¹⁴⁰ The meeting rooms in the building are useful for private functions and small gatherings that do not require the scale and versatility of the multipurpose hall. The arrangement of spaces in the existing building serves the community in a variety of ways.

Fig. 4.5 Annotated ground floor plan of BPPC and BPP. ←

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

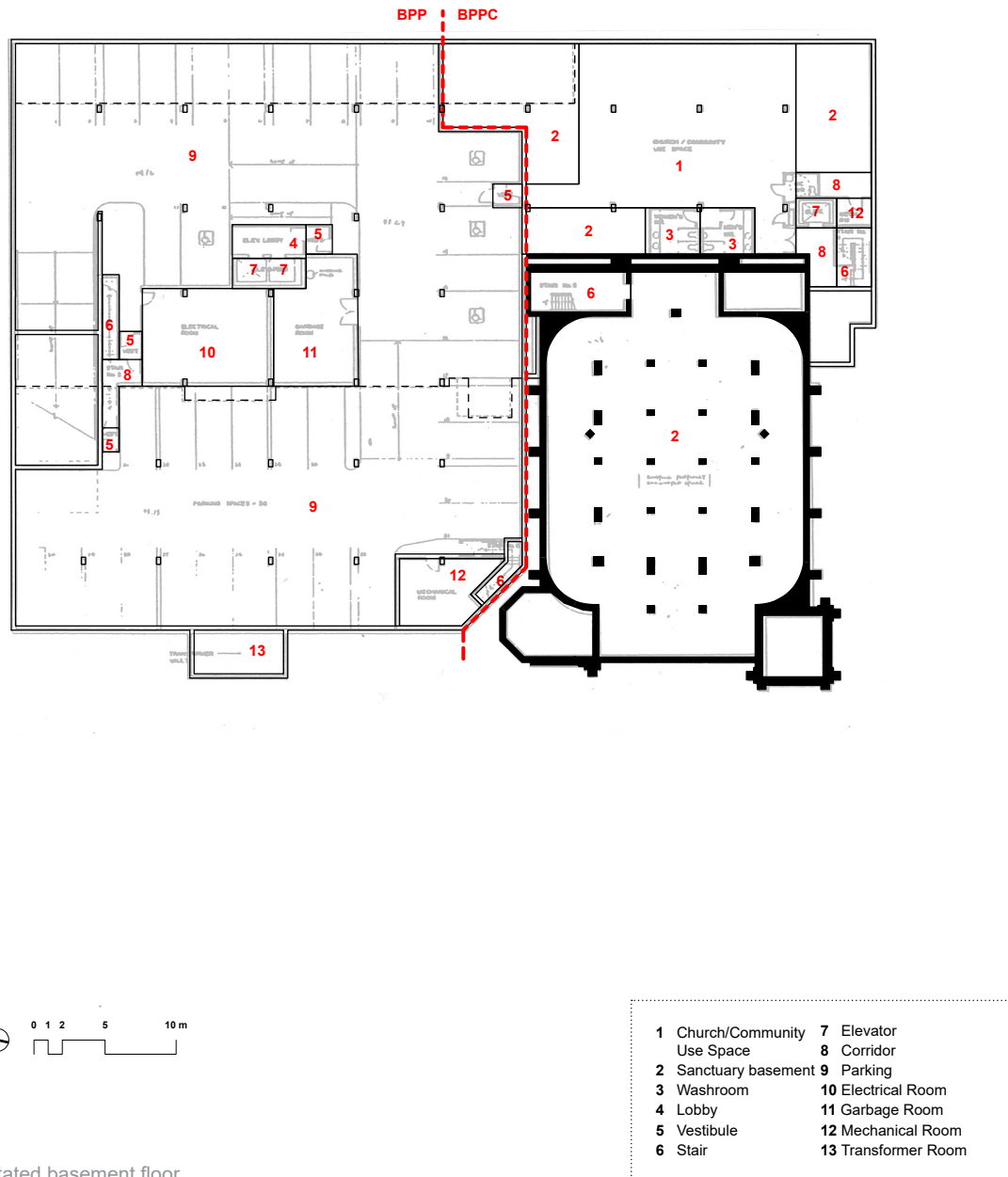
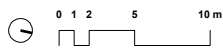
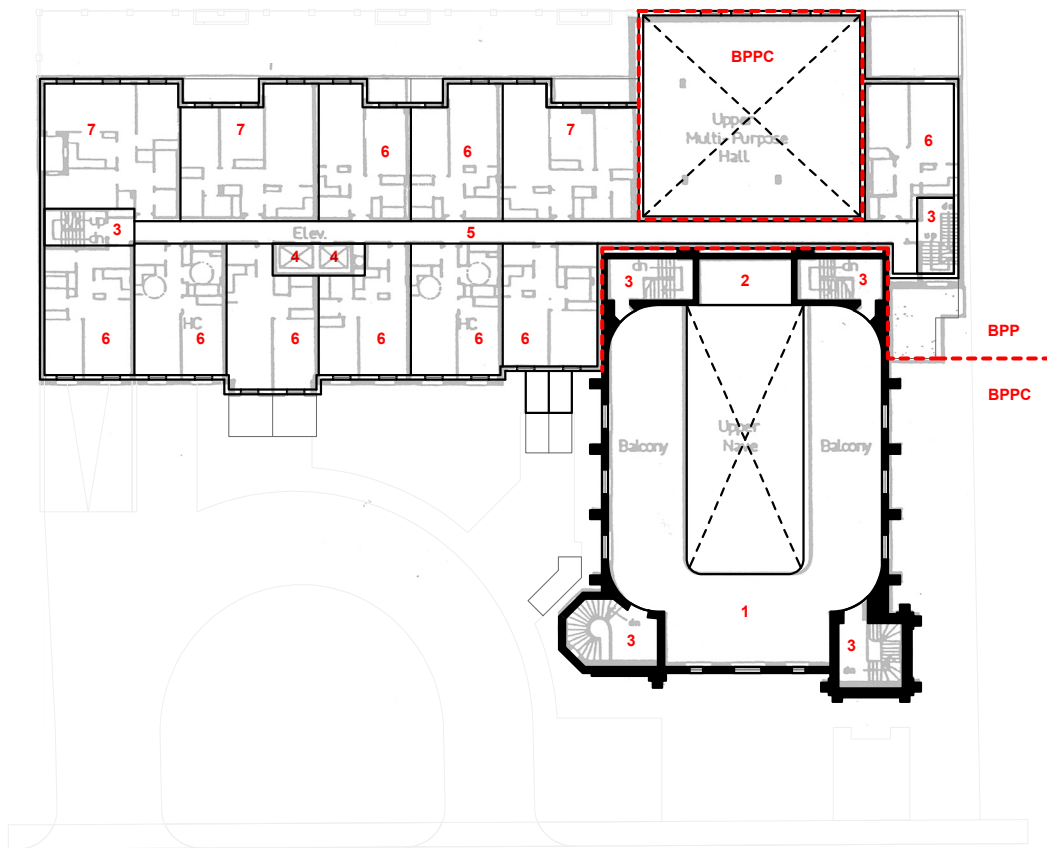


Fig. 4.6 Annotated basement floor plan of BPPC and BPP.



- 1 Sanctuary
- 2 Organ
- 3 Stair
- 4 Elevator
- 5 Corridor
- 6 One-bedroom unit
- 7 Two-bedroom unit

Fig. 4.7 Annotated second floor plan of BPPC and BPP.

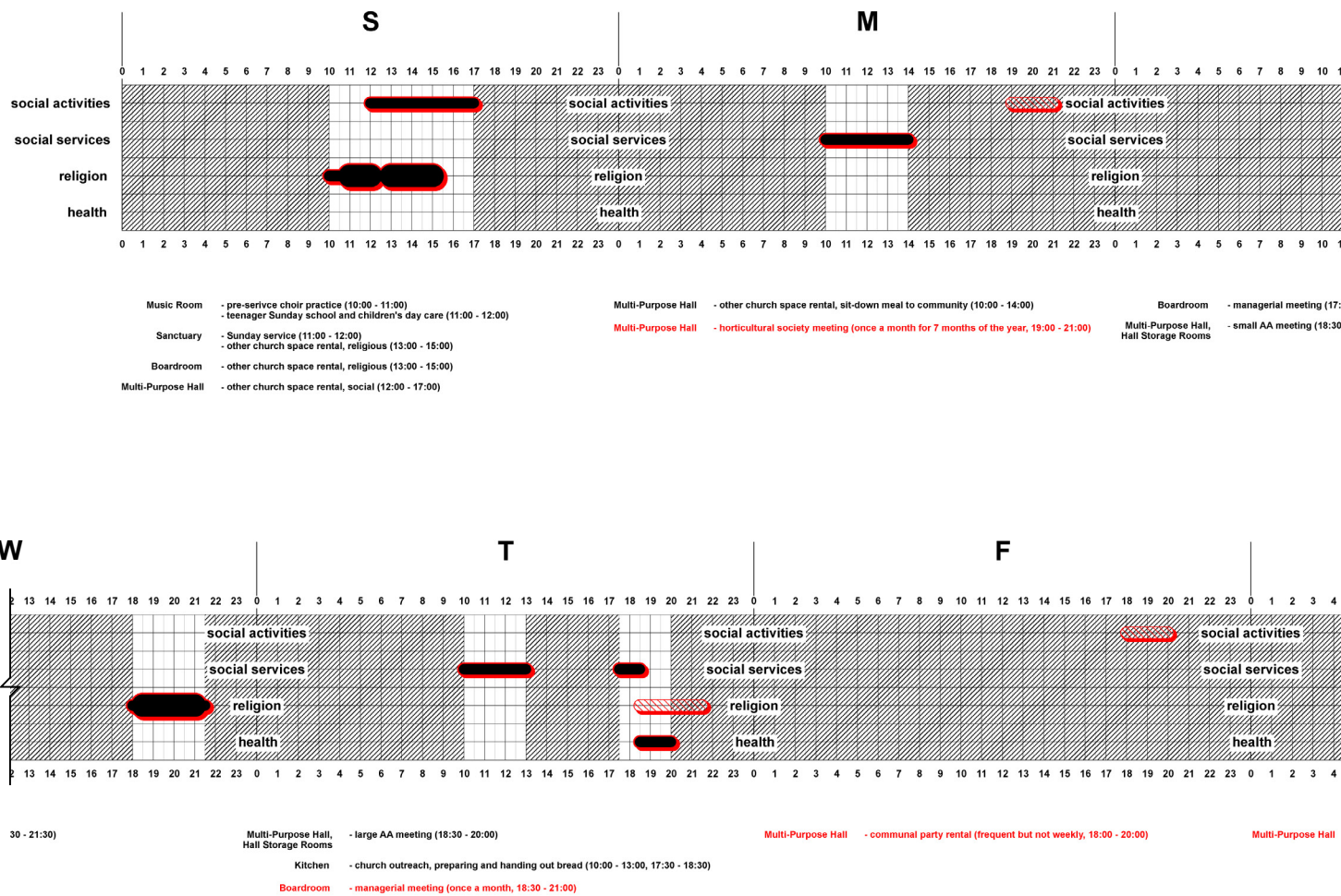
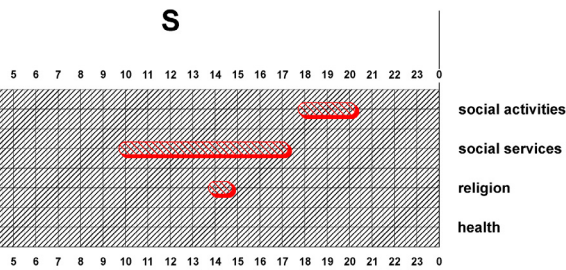
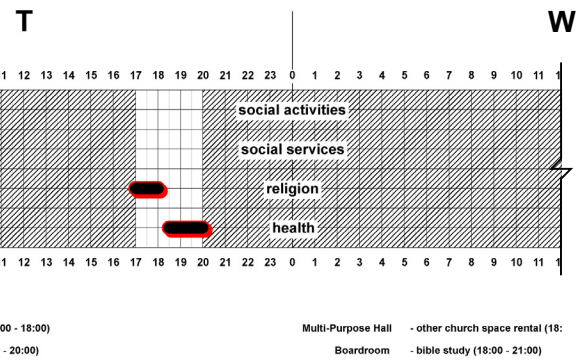


Fig. 4.8 Typical weekly schedule of BPPC pre-COVID-19 pandemic; not inclusive of all events (i.e. church celebrations, weddings, etc.) as they are atypical. The red bubbles refer to frequent but not regular weekly usage.



Typical Weekly Schedule Pre-COVID-19

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, BPPC’s typical weekly schedule involved several different activities led by various community groups. Religious use by BPPC was mainly on Sundays; they used the sanctuary space for worship and other meeting rooms for childcare or Sunday school during worship. Other church groups rented various spaces across the week, such as the multipurpose hall, to provide a sit-down meal to members of the community and for various religious and social activities. The AA groups would use the multipurpose hall and smaller meeting rooms two days of the week for a few hours.¹⁴¹

¹⁴¹ The information on BPPC’s previous scheduling was gathered from conversations with BPPC building manager in January and February 2023.

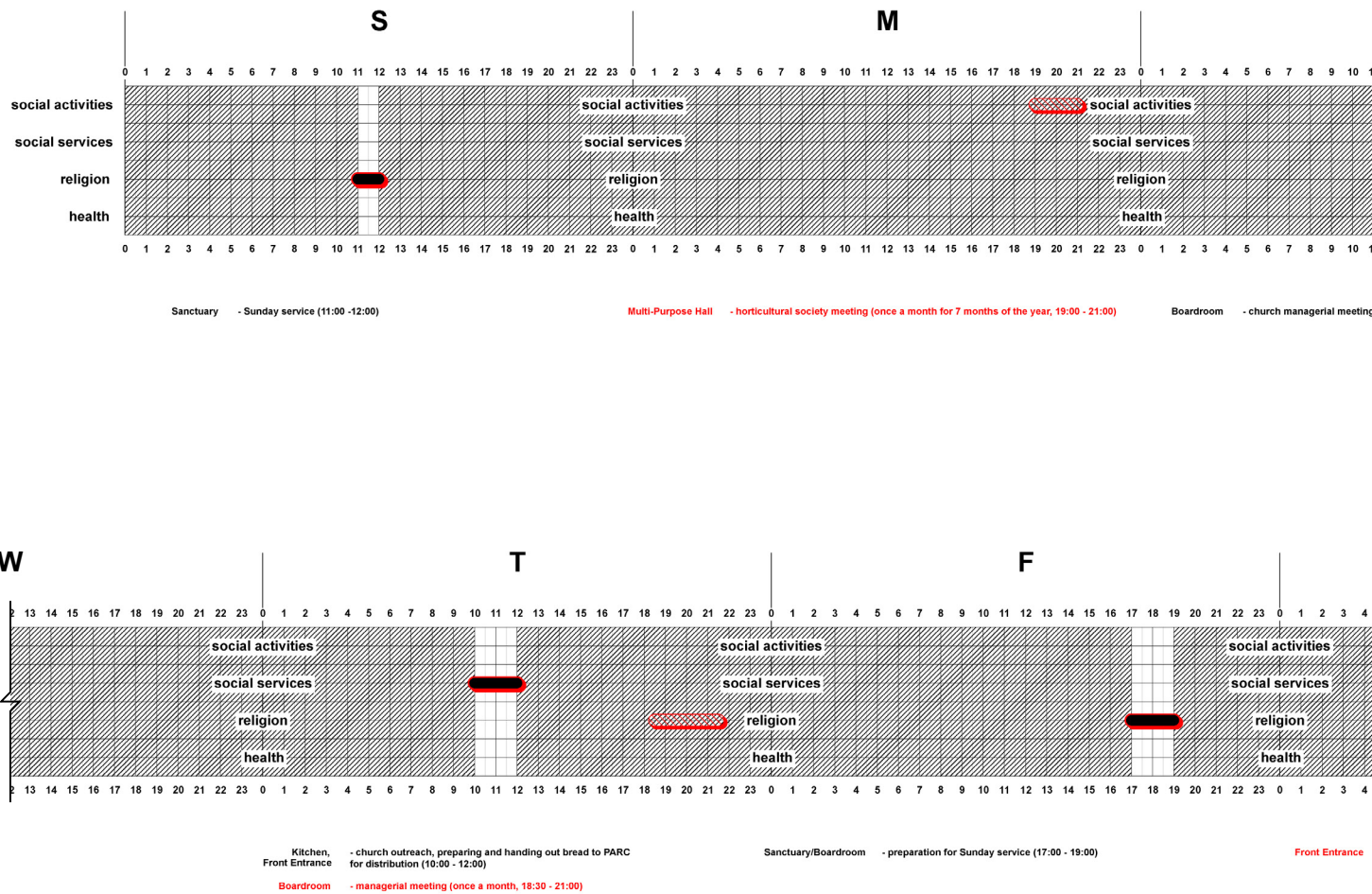
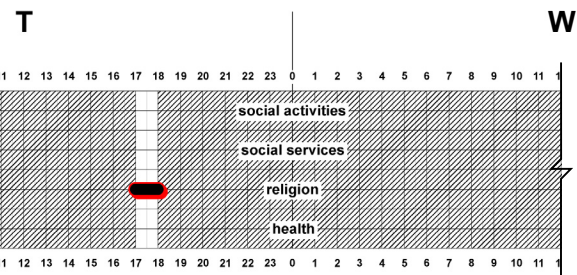
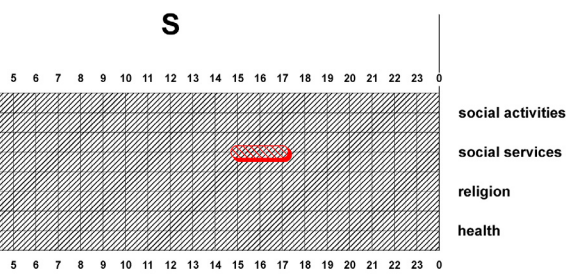


Fig. 4.9 Typical weekly schedule of BPPC during COVID-19 pandemic; not inclusive of all events (i.e. church celebrations, weddings, etc.) as they are atypical. The red bubbles refer to frequent but not regular weekly usage.



for finances (17:00 - 18:00)



- meal handout to community (once a month, 15:00 - 17:00)

Typical Weekly Schedule During COVID-19

However, BPPC is experiencing issues with declining use.¹⁴² Given that space requirements for social gatherings were restrictive during the pandemic due to strict health protocols, BPPC had to limit renting out their spaces, which produced financial setbacks.¹⁴³ Like many other small and precariously situated businesses, BPPC may never bounce back to its pre-pandemic social calendar.

¹⁴² The information on BPPC's current scheduling was gathered from conversations with BPPC building manager in January and February 2023.

¹⁴³ From a conversation with BPPC building manager on November 26, 2022.

The current financial condition of BPPC threatens the persistence of the church building. While the rental incomes from the ancillary spaces provide another source of funding for the congregation, it is not enough to deal with the extent of repairs required for the upkeep of the church building. This burden of finances is made evident by the degree of visible disrepair that has not been addressed in areas both outside and inside the church building.



Fig. 4.10 Facade of BPPC.



Fig. 4.11 In the winter of 2023, the church billboard has not been updated since 2021. Plastic buckets are placed at the ends of the front stair treads and railings due to the frequent littering and drug paraphernalia that is left behind.



Fig. 4.12 It appears as though a homeless person's belongings are tucked between the church building's buttresses along the north facade.



Fig. 4.13 One of two glass panes on the north facade of the church that is partially broken.



Fig. 4.14 Two of two glass panes on the north facade of the church that is partially broken.



Fig. 4.15 Part of the ceiling and the wall in the narthex showing signs of interior damage.



Fig. 4.16 Ceiling and wall damage in the north tower.



Fig. 4.17 Dust from water-damaged drywall collects on the floor of the sanctuary gallery. Buckets collect water during rainy days.



Fig. 4.18 The ceiling and wall along the south wall have experienced extensive damage from a roof leak, posing structural concerns.



Fig. 4.19 The church basement is used for miscellaneous storage with access to some of the building's service equipment.



Fig. 4.20 Ceiling damage above the organ and nave of the church building.



Fig. 4.21 More signs of water damage along the ceiling and wall towards the front of the church building.





Fig. 4.22 The sanctuary of the original BPPC building. ←

Fig. 4.23 The multipurpose 'Friendship' hall in the BPPC addition. ↑

Although the church building is relatively manageable maintenance-wise, it may not be long before it has safety issues. The main concern is potential damage to the structure that has been caused by water seepage through the building's slate roof and envelope.¹⁴⁴

Unlike the UCC, which has developed Kindred Works to manage its existing real estate, the Presbyterian properties in Canada are each owned by their respective congregations.¹⁴⁵ As Presbyterian congregations balance delivering their social mission and dealing with their building's maintenance issues in the face of limited funding, they may begin to explore options best suited to their own interests (which happen to be aligned with supporting their communities) regarding the future of their building.

To this end, imagining how a diversity of community groups can be encouraged to use the building and how it can be designed to be more friendly and multifunctional is an exercise worth exploring. The broader community might find more purpose in the building if it aligned more closely to contemporary needs, thus bringing more usage and more funding along with it. Considering the trend of religious decline, the infrequent usage of the sanctuary, and the deteriorating layers of the church building, this part of the property is called into question.

While the church is more imperative for transformation, the spaces provided in the 1992 addition would also benefit from being considered as part of the remodeling.

¹⁴⁴ While the roof is still in serviceable condition, the average life of slate roofs is around 130 years. Replacing the roof in a manner conducive to heritage standards would be unaffordable for BPPC to replace. This information has come from a conversation with BPPC building manager on November 26, 2022.

¹⁴⁵ Don Muir, "Equipping for Eldership - Selling Church Property," The Presbyterian Church in Canada (n.d.), 1, <https://presbyterian.ca/downloads/40098/>.



Fig. 4.24 An adjacent kitchen servery is useful for serving meals to people in the multipurpose hall.



Fig. 4.25 The shared outdoor terrace is in hiatus during the winter season.



Fig. 4.26 The front lobby to the church addition.



Fig. 4.27 One of the church's meeting rooms.



Fig. 4.28 The seniors' recreation room.



Fig. 4.29 The shared basement between the church and seniors' community.

Assessing the Existing Building

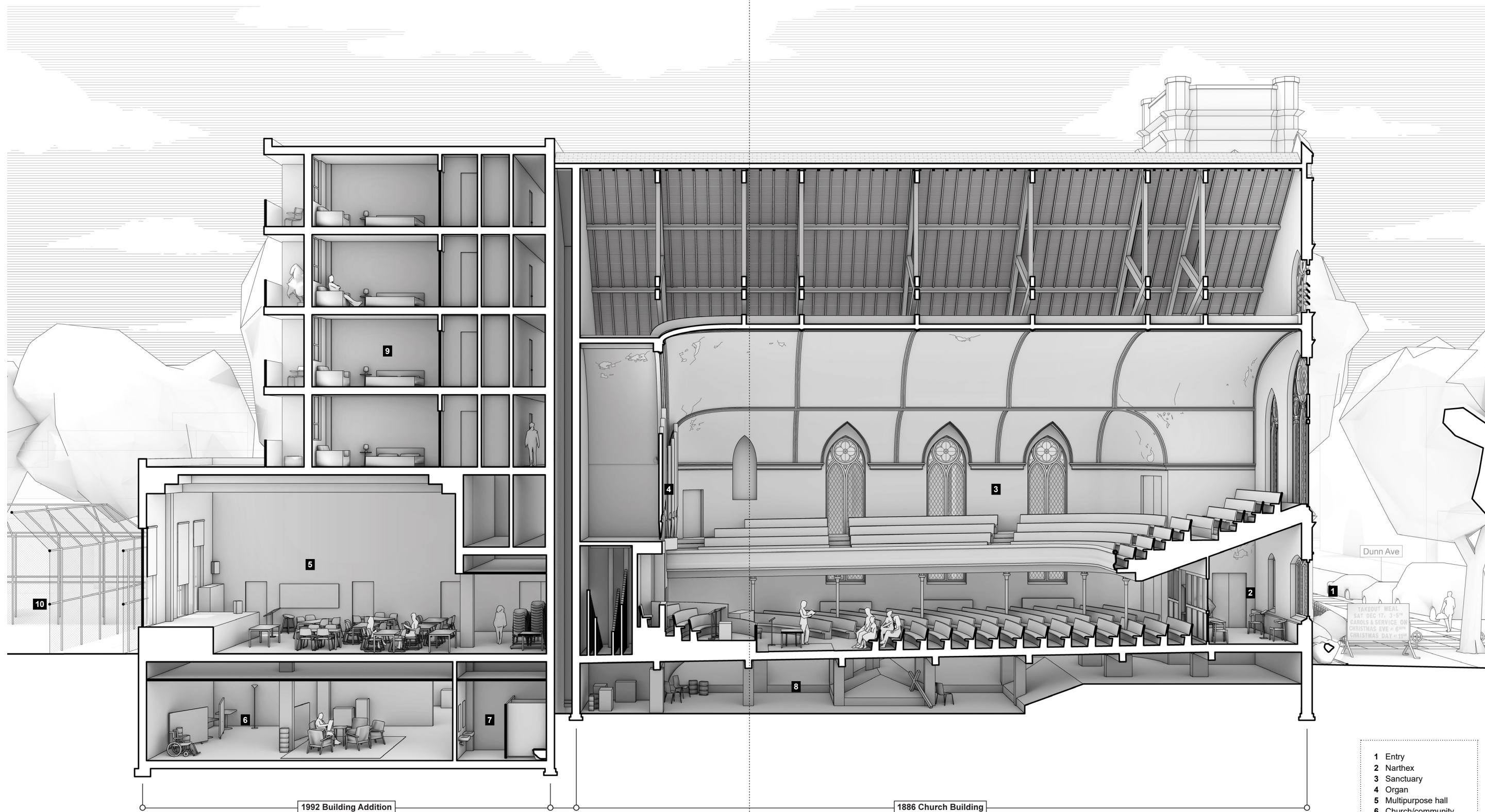
Before commencing the design of the adaptation, it is crucial to assess the architectural features provided by the existing conditions. Considering the church building:

- The atrium of the sanctuary space has a quality worth preserving.
- The amphitheatrical gallery provides a mezzanine level for increased capacity and further appreciation of the atrium space.
- The church organ is special and can find continued usage through musical rehearsals and performances.
- The large stained-glass windows of the street façade provide natural and playful daylight through a coloured filter.

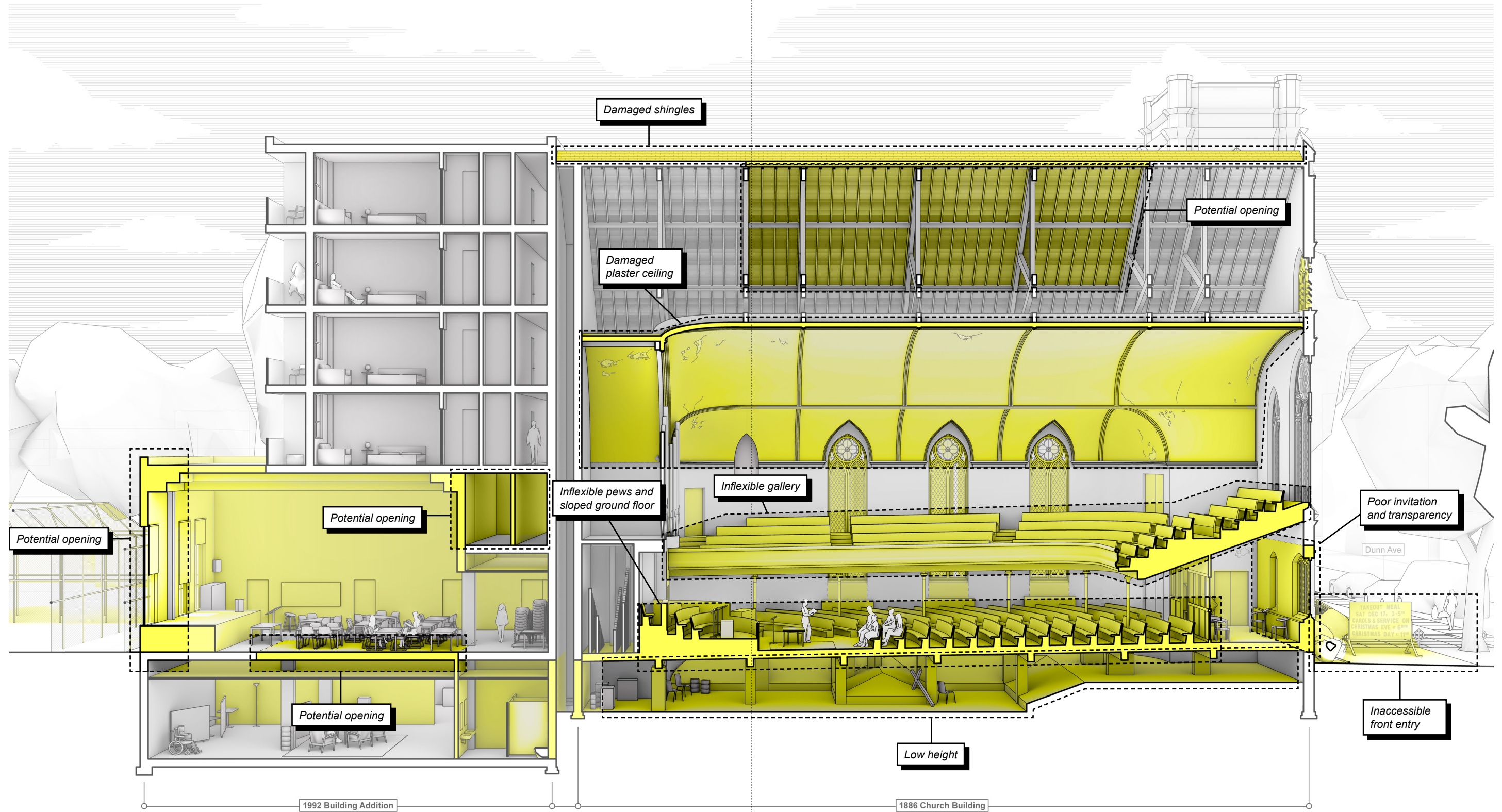
The additions made to the existing church building can also be considered:

- The mixture of shared private and public spaces facilitates different levels of sociability.
- Shared access to the outdoor terrace provides users with another environment to socialize in.
- The kitchen and multifunctional hall are a suitable pairing for larger social gatherings involving food.
- The apartments provide essential affordable housing and amenities to the vulnerable senior population.

Fig. 4.30 Longitudinal section of the existing BPPC/BPP building. →



- 1 Entry
- 2 Narthex
- 3 Sanctuary
- 4 Organ
- 5 Multipurpose hall
- 6 Church/community space
- 7 Washrooms
- 8 Sanctuary basement
- 9 Seniors' apartments
- 10 Sports fields



While there are some benefits provided by the existing conditions, certain architectural aspects are counterproductive to a more communal vision. Some of these aspects include:

- The ground floor of the sanctuary, which is raked and full of inflexible pews.
- The façade of the church building, which provides no visual connection to the activities that may be happening inside, nor an accessible front entry.
- The lower stained-glass windows, which similarly prevent public connection through their visual opacities.
- The damaged plaster ceiling and roof, and the potentially-damaged church structure.
- The low height of the sanctuary basement.
- The limited visual and physical connections between the church building and the building addition.
- The driveway, which, while necessary for the convenience and safety of the functioning of the seniors' program, produces a discontinuous ground plane solely dedicated to vehicular usage.

Fig. 4.31 Longitudinal section of the existing BPPC/BPP building, with the parts of the building being questioned highlighted in yellow. ←

Many of these aspects, although suitable for their current private and programmatic scenarios, limit potential social opportunities that would befit a more inclusive and socially constructive building within the urban fabric.

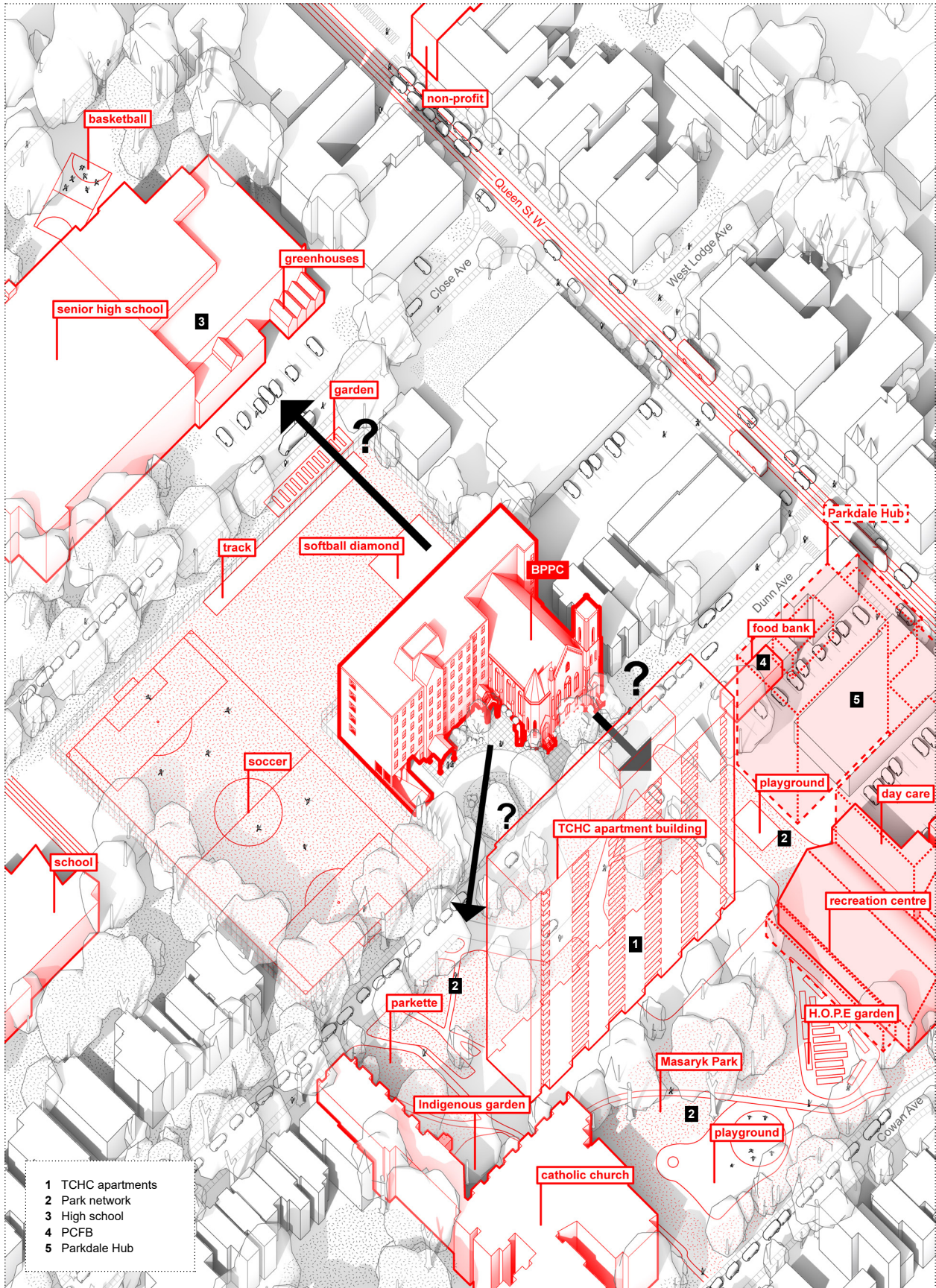
Even though the transformation of the building is centre in the issues at hand, it is worthwhile to consider the immediate neighbourhood adjacencies. Key sites include:

1. The Toronto Community Housing Corporation (TCHC) apartment building directly across, holding 384 rent-geared-to-income units; the people living here are precariously housed.
2. The small park network that connects Masaryk Park and Dunn Avenue Parkette.
3. The senior high school of Parkdale Collegiate Institute. Its accompanying outdoor resources include sports fields and a small garden.
4. The recently relocated food bank, PCFB.
5. The future Parkdale Hub. The additional residential density and rearrangement of publicly accessible community spaces maintain and introduce opportunities for recreation, learning, and flexible multipurpose rooms.

The array of neighbouring built social infrastructures situates BPPC within a diverse range of potential users and connections.

Having understood the existing physical conditions and surroundings of the building, how can a new communal purpose come to fruition within it?

Fig. 4.32 Axonometric of BPPC within its existing neighbourhood context of adjacent social infrastructures. →



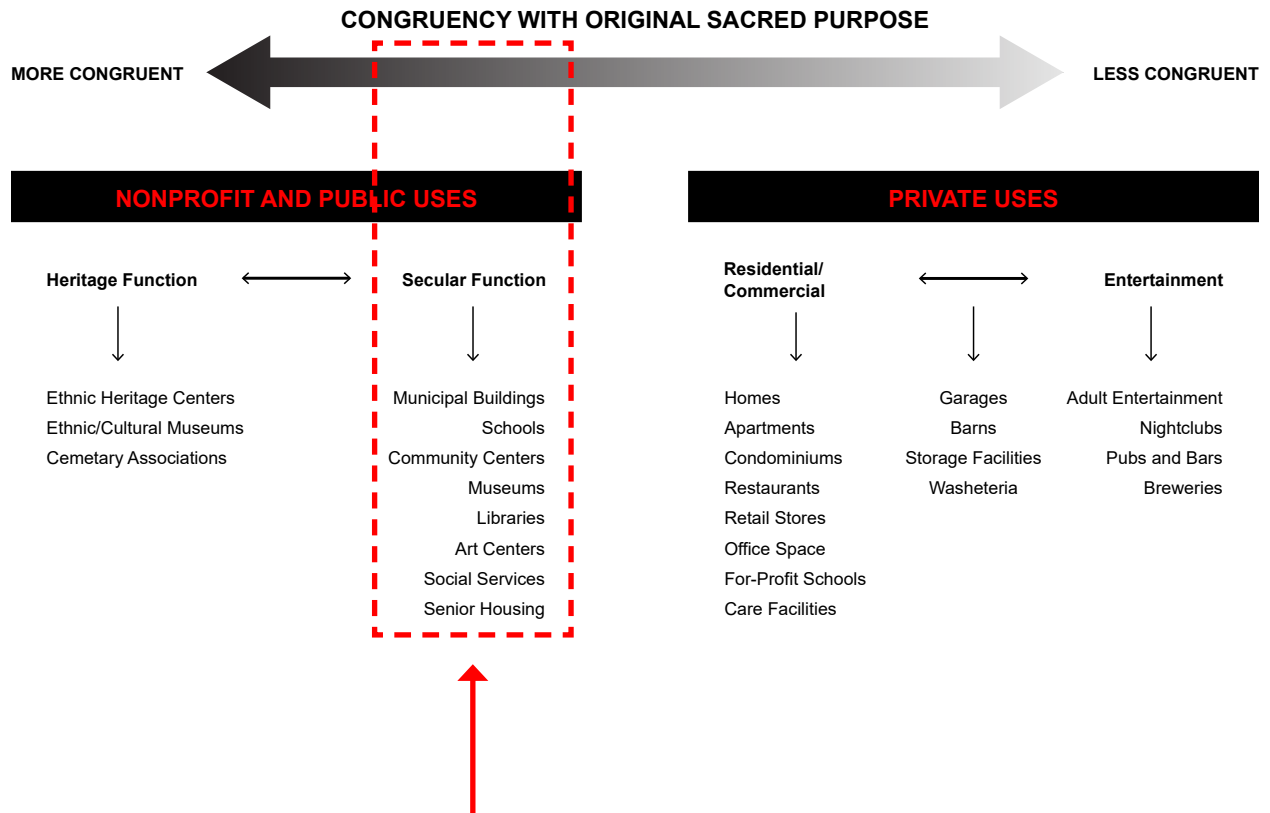


Fig. 4.33 The continuum of secular adaptive reuses. The uses listed under the secular function align well with BPPC's existing uses as well as the needs of South Parkdale.

Approaching Adaptation

While it has been established that a socially oriented future for BPPC is key, there are various uses that may be appropriate. According to emeritus professor of economic development Larry Ledebur, churches can find their most ‘appropriate’ use “to the extent that they are congruent with the original sacred function of the church, including its social mission, and with the values and vision of the community in which the church is located.”¹⁴⁶ The ‘original sacred purpose’ can be categorized into two groups: “‘congregational functions’ aimed at church members, and ‘social mission functions,’ which can overlap congregational functions but are intended for the wider community.”¹⁴⁷ It is crucial to align with “social mission functions,” such as “activities that support community cohesiveness and promote community values and goals, including economic development and community advocacy,”¹⁴⁸ especially as congregational functions become less prominent in their shifting sociocultural environments. The significance of this sacred congruency is that it dictates the likelihood of the transformation receiving support from public stakeholders, such as the various levels of government and the local community.¹⁴⁹ BPPC ultimately needs to achieve this support to secure a stronger role within its community. What changes must occur for BPPC to achieve better congruency with their community’s values and vision?

Community Visions from the Parkdale People’s Economy

Fortunately, for BPPC, PPE has shown interest in the possibility of developing a local church into a community food hub to address the neighbourhood’s needs. In the 2016 Community Planning Study report, PPE mentions that “an immense possibility... lies in an emerging community partnership among Greenest City, Parkdale Community Health Centre, and the Anglican Church of the Epiphany and St Mark, Parkdale (at 201 Cowan Ave).”¹⁵⁰ While this vision aims to work towards “food security, health, and [community]

¹⁴⁶ Larry C. Ledebur, “The ‘Highest and Best’ in Adaptive Reuses,” in *Retired, Rehabbed, Reborn: The Adaptive Reuse of America’s Derelict Religious Buildings and Schools*, eds. Robert A. Simons, Gary DeWine, Larry C. Ledebur and Laura A. Wertheimer (Kent, OH: The Kent State University Press, 2017), 186.

¹⁴⁷ Ledebur, “The ‘Highest and Best’ in Adaptive Reuses,” 169.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid*, 170.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid*, 187.

¹⁵⁰ Kamizaki, *Parkdale Community Planning Study*, 75.

Direction 2: Develop a community food hub for food security, health and economic development through the adaptive reuse of the local church space in conjunction with an expanded urban agriculture site

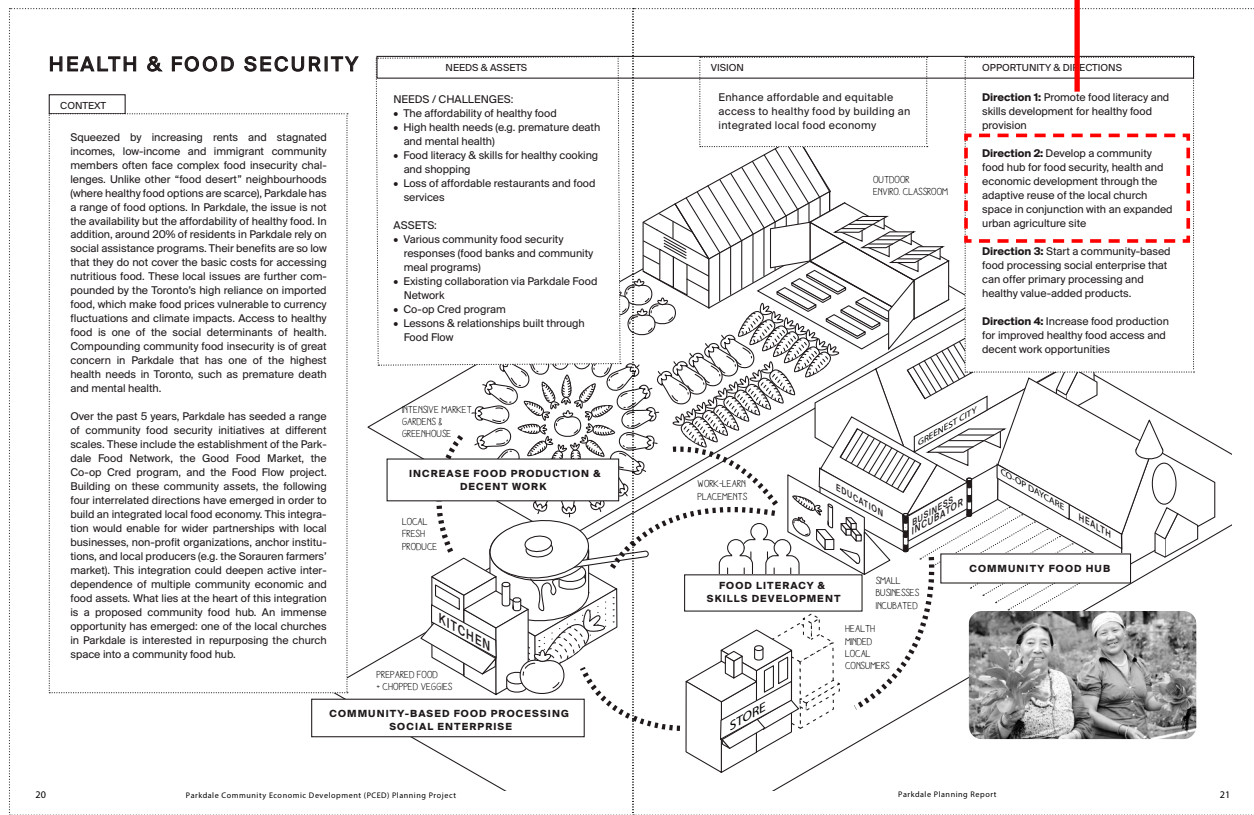


Fig. 4.34 PPE's vision for Food Security includes the adaptive reuse of a church into a community food hub.

economic development,” it has not yet come to fruition.¹⁵¹ However, partnerships between multiple community stakeholders have led to the funding of a substantial grant for strategic distribution that can be used to further other initiatives across the community.¹⁵² While the church involved in PPE’s vision is not BPPC, BPPC would benefit from striving to make similar partnerships in a renewed vision of their own building.

However, can the revitalization of BPPC be more socially ambitious than this previous vision? Can the seven key areas for community action be addressed within one more unified and publicly accessible building?

Influential Built Projects

Existing built projects geared towards community and food are useful in considering how BPPC can transform as a revitalized social infrastructure. Although church buildings have routinely been adapted into more active community spaces around the world, it is equally important to look at projects that address community and sociability in other ways. The integration of food, whether it is through growing, cooking, eating, or serving, is present at various degrees throughout the selected design precedents. The projects also facilitate flexible social spaces, such as for performance, play, eating, or learning, and show various ways of community representation within the architecture.

Hackney School of Food: The adaptation project transforms an old caretaker’s cottage into a primary school’s dedicated kitchen, greenhouse, and gardens for productive education and community spaces. Architectural elements of “space, light, adaptability, and functionality” were prioritized as elements that would bring joy to on-site activities.¹⁵³ A new teaching kitchen is realized within a double-height space, supplied with height-adjustable cooking units. The space connects to an outdoor patio for dining and gardening, weaving the concepts of farm to table in a direct manner. Playful artwork on the façade draws attention to the new social infrastructure.



Fig. 4.35 Children learning how to cook on height-adjustable cooking stations in the teaching kitchen at the Hackney School of Food. Project by Surman Weston in London, United Kingdom.

Nourish Hub: The adaptation of a former post office into a mixed-use workspace and community food hub promotes “learning about healthy eating and cooking food—as a common, social, and community activity—[to] connect diverse cultures, teach meaningful skills, and bring people together.”¹⁵⁴ Led by a non-profit charity with a mission to

¹⁵¹ Parkdale People’s Economy, *Parkdale Community Wealth Building*, 18.

¹⁵² Ibid.

¹⁵³ “Hackney School of Food,” RIBA, n.d., <https://www.architecture.com/awards-and-competitions-landing-page/awards/riba-regional-awards/riba-london-award-winners/2022/hackney-school-of-food>.

¹⁵⁴ “Nourish Hub,” RCKA, n.d., <https://rcka.co.uk/nourish-hub/>.



Fig. 4.36 The community using the multipurpose dining space at the Nourish Hub. Project by RCKa in London, United Kingdom. ↑

Fig. 4.37 The large multipurpose space of Folkehuset Absalon. Project by Arcgency in Copenhagen, Denmark. ←

address hunger and food waste through education, the facility integrates a catering kitchen with indoor and outdoor serving hatches. The two kitchen spaces abut a large multipurpose dining room with flexible furniture; the teaching kitchen can be temporarily separated from other programs by a curtain. A transparent façade with a large sliding door draws people into the space. Artwork created by youth is incorporated onto the ceiling of the main space. Peripheral support spaces, including large fridge rooms, freezers, and pantry areas, support the food-related functions. This project won the New London Awards Community Prize in 2021, as well as the 2022 RIBA Journal MacEwen Award, handed out annually to architecture projects demonstrating commitment for social good.¹⁵⁵



Crypt Redevelopment at Christ Church Spitalfields: The renovation of a crypt on an existing heritage-protected church site introduces new functional spaces and elements of adaptability and flexibility to upgrade its social capabilities. Support spaces such as a catering kitchen, café, circulation, storage, and bathrooms are kept to the periphery to maintain a central zone for the crypt’s multipurpose parish lounge and hall. The central rooms can be interconnected to form one large uninterrupted space or subdivided into smaller rooms using adjustable curtains and acoustic accordion walls; movable furniture and separate points of entry and exit permit flexibility. Openings are maximized for natural light to enter,¹⁵⁶ and the materiality of the added oak elements brings feelings of extra warmth to the space.

Folkehuset Absalon: Once a defunct church, this revitalized Danish church building is now used as a community centre. In the renovation of the building, the integrity of the church atrium is preserved; comfort is maintained even when large groups use the space because it is so generous. An adjacent commercial kitchen hosts weekly ‘social dining’ events. The open multipurpose space incorporates peripheral storage spaces as well as flexible furniture for various social arrangements; a stage and curtain transform the room for community performances. Light-coloured walls provide a friendly informality; the building is “an extension of one’s own living room”¹⁵⁷. An added mezzanine level overlooks the main multipurpose space, connects different spaces, and provides moments for more intimate socializing. The range of programs offered serves various socio-economic backgrounds, thus engaging all levels of the community.

Fig. 4.38 The Crypt Redevelopment at Christ Church Spitalfields. Project by Dow Jones Architects in London, United Kingdom. ↑

¹⁵⁵ Chris Foges, “MacEwen Award Winner: Nourish Hub’s Communal Effort Is Recipe for Success,” RIBA Journal, February 1, 2022, <https://www.ribaj.com/buildings/macewen-winner-2022-nourish-hub-rkca>.

¹⁵⁶ “Dow Jones Architects - Crypt Redevelopment at Christ Church Spitalfields,” Divisare, n.d., <https://divisare.com/projects/303502-dow-jones-architects-david-grandorge-crypt-redevelopment-at-christ-church-spitalfields>.

¹⁵⁷ “About Absalon,” Folkehuset Absalon, n.d., <https://absaloncph.dk/en/about-absalon/>.

A Direction for Building Adaptation

BPPC has undergone various infrastructural changes over the decades to reflect the needs of its community. The current setup of spaces and functions holds some merit but could serve the community in more profound ways. Moreover, community use of the building has decreased over time, partly exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. This situation reveals that BPPC faces imminent social and financial difficulty as they deal with ongoing maintenance challenges. Considering that the congregation has the freedom to transform usage, one can speculate how BPPC may find greater social purpose through appropriate changes in both architecture and program. By evaluating the existing building's potential to becoming more relevant in the community, it becomes evident that certain areas of the building's interior and exterior spaces would benefit from architectural changes. Exemplary design precedents that incorporate aspects of community, food, and flexibility demonstrate tactics for creating socially constructive adaptations. Through the various considerations explored, the ways in which BPPC might adapt become clearer.

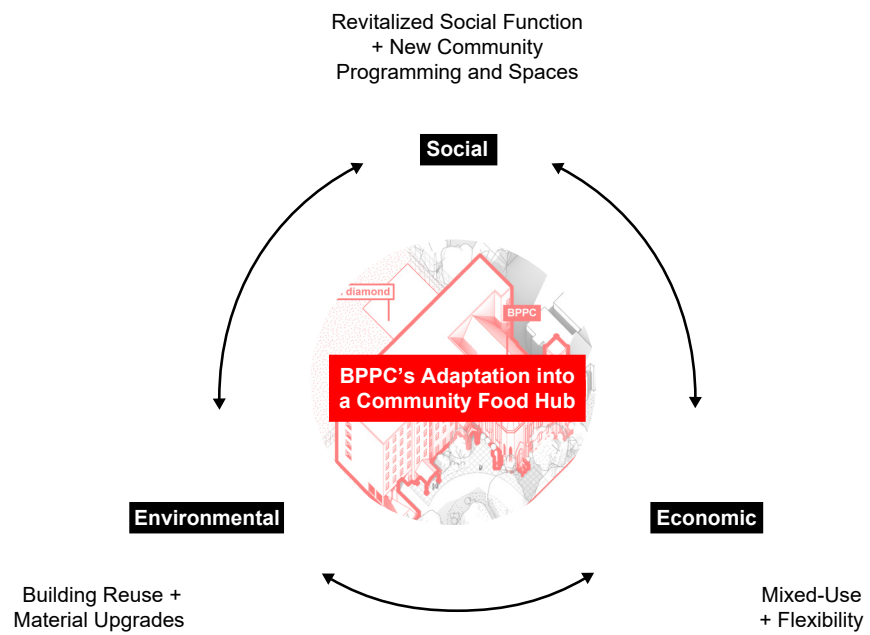


Fig. 4.39 The three prongs of sustainability framework guiding many aspects of the design proposal.

Design Proposal



How do we adapt towards community? ...

Building a New Framework

“[I]f it is true that the built environment is a reflection of our cultural values, then how we relate to that built environment as those cultural values change, is fundamental.”¹⁵⁸

- Jorge Otero-Pailos, “Architecture and Human Attachment”

Parkdale People’s Palace is a design proposal for the adaptation of BPPC and BPP into a community food hub. It takes on this title to signify the importance of the neighbourhood (*Parkdale*), its dedication to the community (*People’s*), and the suggestion of renewed sociocultural significance of a social infrastructure (*Palace*¹⁵⁹). It also alludes to South Parkdale’s main community advocate—PPE—to honour the working groups driving the neighbourhood into one of greater social responsibility. Anticipating that local people from various socio-economic backgrounds and age groups will use the building, the project sees how their intersection might result in the creation of collective activities, volunteering opportunities, and a greater appreciation of social infrastructure and heritage. The goal is to provide a more productive and communal ensemble of spaces and program to revitalize the church property into a place that would become used more extensively by its community.

The project defines a loose boundary for design interventions at both the scale of the site and the scale of the building. With the intent to transform the community at large, the design negotiates outdoor spaces in and around the property to better address multiple public needs and to create physical connections through the urban fabric. Could the adjacent sports fields belonging to the senior high school agree to a partial land lease to test out a different communal future? How could the driveway in front of the seniors’ addition better serve to people? Seeing how the urban fabric might change is also important to consider alongside the building’s revitalization.

Fig. 5.1 View of the existing organ at BPPC. ←

¹⁵⁸ Shelton and Stuth, “Architecture and Human Attachment,” 193.

¹⁵⁹ I allude to Eric Klinenberg’s reference of “palaces for the people”—originally coined by Andrew Carnegie to describe the numerous, grand libraries he built globally—to describe social infrastructure; see Klinenberg, *Palaces for the People*, 24.

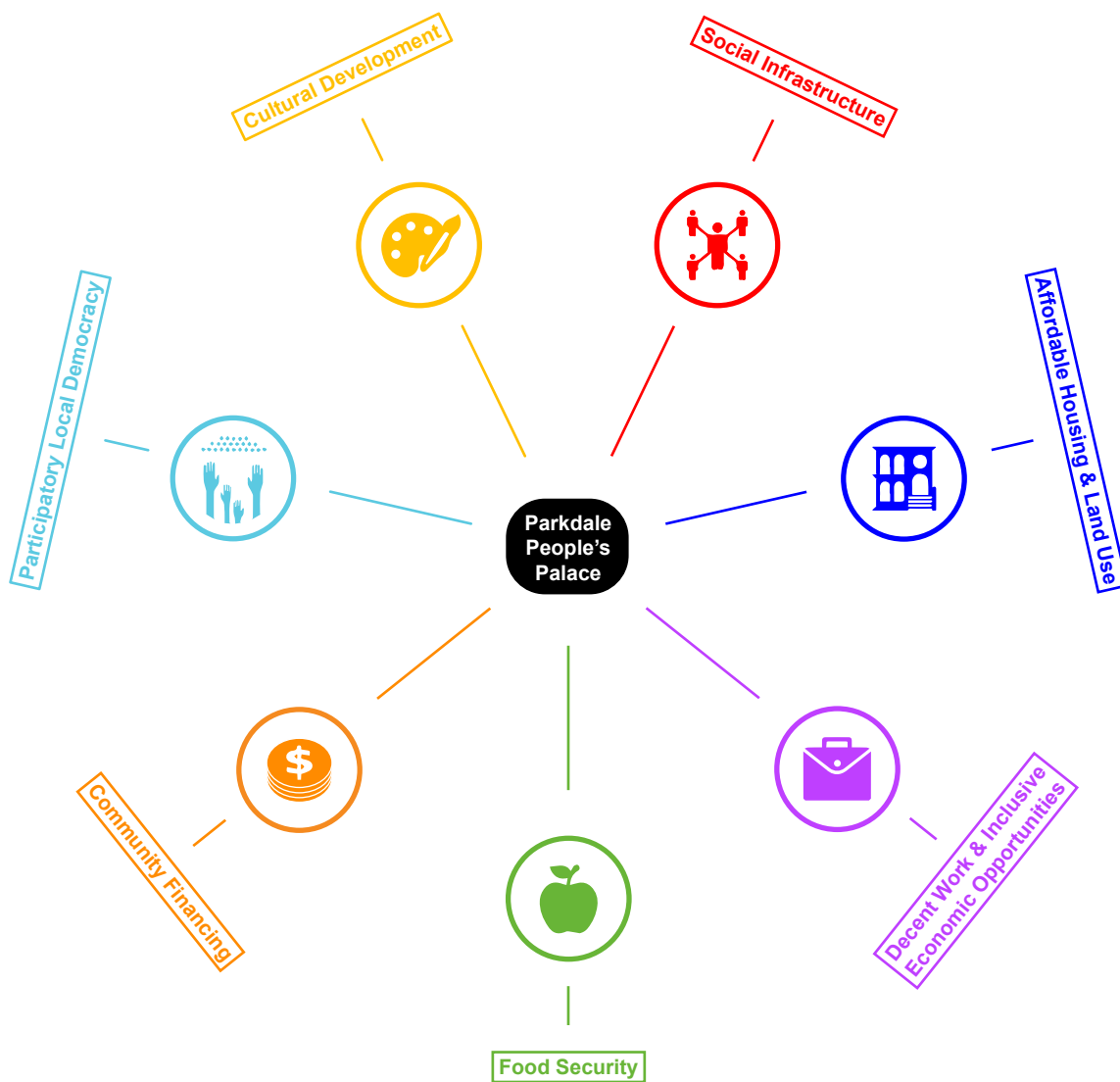


Fig. 5.2 The project is informed by and provides for the seven areas for community action and policy options established for South Parkdale.

The design proposal retains the seniors' apartments to maintain PPE's key action area of *affordable housing and land use* and integrates their amenities into the new scheme. Finding ways to advance the other six goals will make the revitalization more significant to the community and to the building's overall social relevance.

Directions for New Community Programming and Spaces

The 2016 *Parkdale Community Planning Study* report referenced earlier conveniently provides specific directions towards achieving PPE's seven community goals. These directions suggest a range of relevant community-oriented programming, spaces, and governance that are suitable for introducing into the design proposal.

Social Infrastructure: Sharing physical space, where programs and services are provided in one centralized location, is advocated;¹⁶⁰ this can lead to the efficient management of community resources, strengths, and costs.¹⁶¹

Affordable Housing & Land Use: As other community organizations and initiatives work to protect and acquire affordable housing and community assets within the neighbourhood, programs that promote public education on tenant housing rights and issues, as well as those that bring together diverse local stakeholders to discuss land development, are key. Creating partnerships with local schools so that youth could be included in these conversations would be helpful to newcomer and immigrant families whose parents are often less proficient in English.¹⁶²

Decent Work & Inclusive Economic Opportunities: South Parkdale's vulnerable populations would benefit from opportunities for skill development, language proficiency, and job training. 'Transitional' work opportunities that contribute to neighbourhood improvement, such as part-time employment or volunteering, help advance one's career and personal aspirations. These opportunities could be facilitated through the Co-op Cred Program; reviving WEFC's production kitchen and grocery store is useful in this regard, as would the implementation of a co-op café.¹⁶³

Furthermore, cooperative workspaces that can permit various activities— "such as shoemaking and carpet making ... by Tibetan seniors, a ... childcare for low-income [and immigrant] parents, and food growing and processing"—are

¹⁶⁰ Kamizaki, *Parkdale Community Planning Study*, 53.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 26.

¹⁶² *Ibid.*, 55-56.

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*, 39-43.

in community demand.¹⁶⁴ Positioning these alongside social and health services, employment and educational programs, and food security initiatives would support one's mental and physical health and individual development.¹⁶⁵

Food Security: Low-income individuals may not have access to a kitchen, or one that is adequate, where they can properly prepare and store fresh food. Alongside providing spaces to cook and store food, programs that promote food literacy and skills education training, such as preparing, cooking, and preserving, are critical.¹⁶⁶

In addition, Parkdale lacks a sufficient supply of “certified commercial kitchens, storage facilities, large freezers, equipment, and programming spaces.”¹⁶⁷ Complimentary spaces, such as those for dining, cooperative daycare, and community gardening, will foster sociability alongside the development of food security, work, and supplementary income.¹⁶⁸

Community Financing: Financial literacy workshops that inform community members how to invest in the neighbourhood is important to include in regular programming.¹⁶⁹

Participatory Local Democracy: To achieve “community capacity building and leadership development,” it is important to foster experiential learning opportunities where participatory democracy can be practised.¹⁷⁰ A physical place where relevant information about the neighbourhood is provided, as well as corresponding resources and spaces for meeting to launch early initiatives, is integral to supporting participation in local democracy.¹⁷¹

Cultural Development: There is a desire “to promote the appreciation and celebration of community diversity as well as [the] mutual understanding of differences in Parkdale ... [which can be achieved by creating] more infrastructure and points of encounters.”¹⁷² The community also desires accessible drop-in spaces that can foster community-based cultural activities.¹⁷³ These spaces could be further enhanced “using narratives, arts, and visuals” to represent the community’s “lived experiences, histories, and aspirations,” which can mobilize prominent stakeholders emotionally towards greater community change.¹⁷⁴

¹⁶⁴ Ibid, 67.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid, 71-72.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid, 44-45.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid, 75.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid, 76.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid, 78.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid, 81.

¹⁷¹ Ibid, 82.

¹⁷² Ibid, 86.

¹⁷³ Ibid.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid, 87.



Fig. 5.3 A word cloud highlighting the most used words in the 2016 Parkdale Community Planning Study report by PPE.

In summary, programs and spaces that facilitate educational, food-related, and cultural activities are appropriate and relevant to South Parkdale's diverse community and BPPC's adaptation. It will be useful to have spaces that are open to multiple functions, i.e., multipurpose, as well as more permanent support spaces, like kitchens and storage. These spaces should come in varying degrees of publicness and produce moments for community expression.

Design Rationale

Several project goals have been developed to address the larger aspirations of community, sociability, flexibility, and sustainability within the adaptation project:

Public Connectivity: This goal considers how the building might better connect with the public. It includes creating visible transparency to reveal interior activities; increasing accessibility to accommodate the physical needs of a range of demographics; and creating expressive moments for community representation across the building. Including relevant spaces and programs will also encourage the community to use the building.

Because this is an adaptation project, public connectivity is addressed initially; human attachment is associated with the building simply by existing in the community for a long time. The ways in which changes are applied must be considerate of this potential attachment.

Social Mixability: This goal is concerned with creating opportunities for people to interact with one another. Spaces and programs that promote various kinds of social interaction, including the accidental kind, are key. Certain architectural strategies, such as open floor plans and atriums, can make these opportunities more common; new openings for circulation between spaces help further. Providing spaces that vary in their degree of publicness is important, as private social gatherings can also be socially constructive for people. Finally, people will be more inclined to use and stay in spaces that are comfortable to be in, so a focus on creating pleasant interior environments is key.

Social mixability is supported at the outset of the design adaptation by the retention of the seniors' apartments. Through the reconfiguration of their existing amenity spaces on the ground floor and basement, seniors can engage more closely with the new users of the revitalized building; opening the amenities for shared use can further encourage social encounters.

Flexible and Multipurpose Spaces: This goal seeks to facilitate the change of space through manual or automatic elements embedded in the architecture and flexible furniture and equipment. It includes multipurpose spaces of various sizes, and furniture that is easily movable and socially conducive. Together, numerous communal configurations can be made, which is appealing to a community with different functional needs. In addition, these affordances provide people with a greater sense of agency in community spaces, which can potentially generate greater human attachment within them.



Fig. 5.4 Various sketches illustrating aspects involved in advancing project goals.

Each of the project goals encourage certain architectural tactics, which are strengthened when used in conjunction with other tactics; for example, the goal of public connectivity encourages a glazed façade to provide views and light into the building, but without programs that generate social activity, its application would not be as warranted. These symbiotic strategies make design moves more justifiable for their double-serving purposes.

Among the building layers¹⁷⁵ that are changed to advance the project's goals, those affected by disrepair are firstly addressed in the process of upgrading. The proposal suggests further changes to layers where more socially fruitful outcomes could be produced.

Phasing

The proposal imagines a four-phase adaptation process for financial viability. As phases progress, community support and trust will grow, thereby prompting the completion of the remaining phases.

Phase One, church building adaptation: The church building needs repair and alignment with its sociocultural context, so it is addressed first. The proposed changes involve demolition and landscape construction, requiring substantial upfront capital investment. Despite this, these changes have the most income-generating and socially transformative potential.

Phase Two, building addition integration: The parts of the ground floor essential to the continued functioning of the seniors' apartments are left untouched; this includes the structural elements that keep the levels above intact, elevator shafts, modes of egress, and support spaces such as the mail room and basement parking.

Phase Three, outdoor church property transformation: The open space south of the church building and in front of the seniors' addition are transformed.

Phase Four, beyond church property connection: The sports fields behind the church property, currently allocated to the senior high school nearby, is negotiated through a land lease for community use.

The project completed in its entirety will provide the most interconnectedness within the urban fabric and the greatest impact as a revitalized social infrastructure. The following pages illustrate how these project goals and larger community goals might come together in BPPC's adaptation.

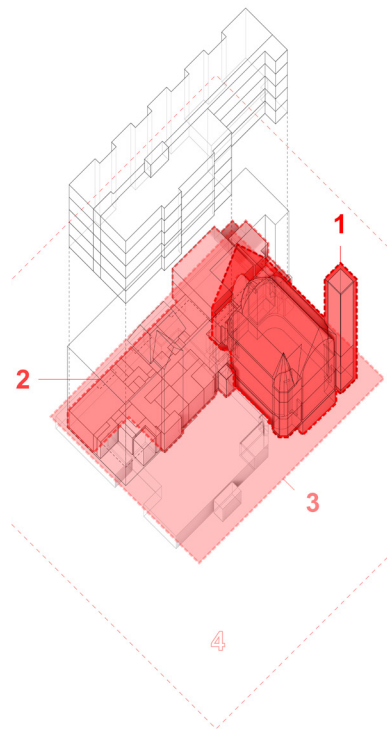


Fig. 5.5 The revitalization is planned to be carried out in four phases.

¹⁷⁵ Building layers as understood through Stewart Brand's six S's of Site, Structure, Skin, Services, Space Plan, and Stuff. See Brand, *How Buildings Learn*, 13.

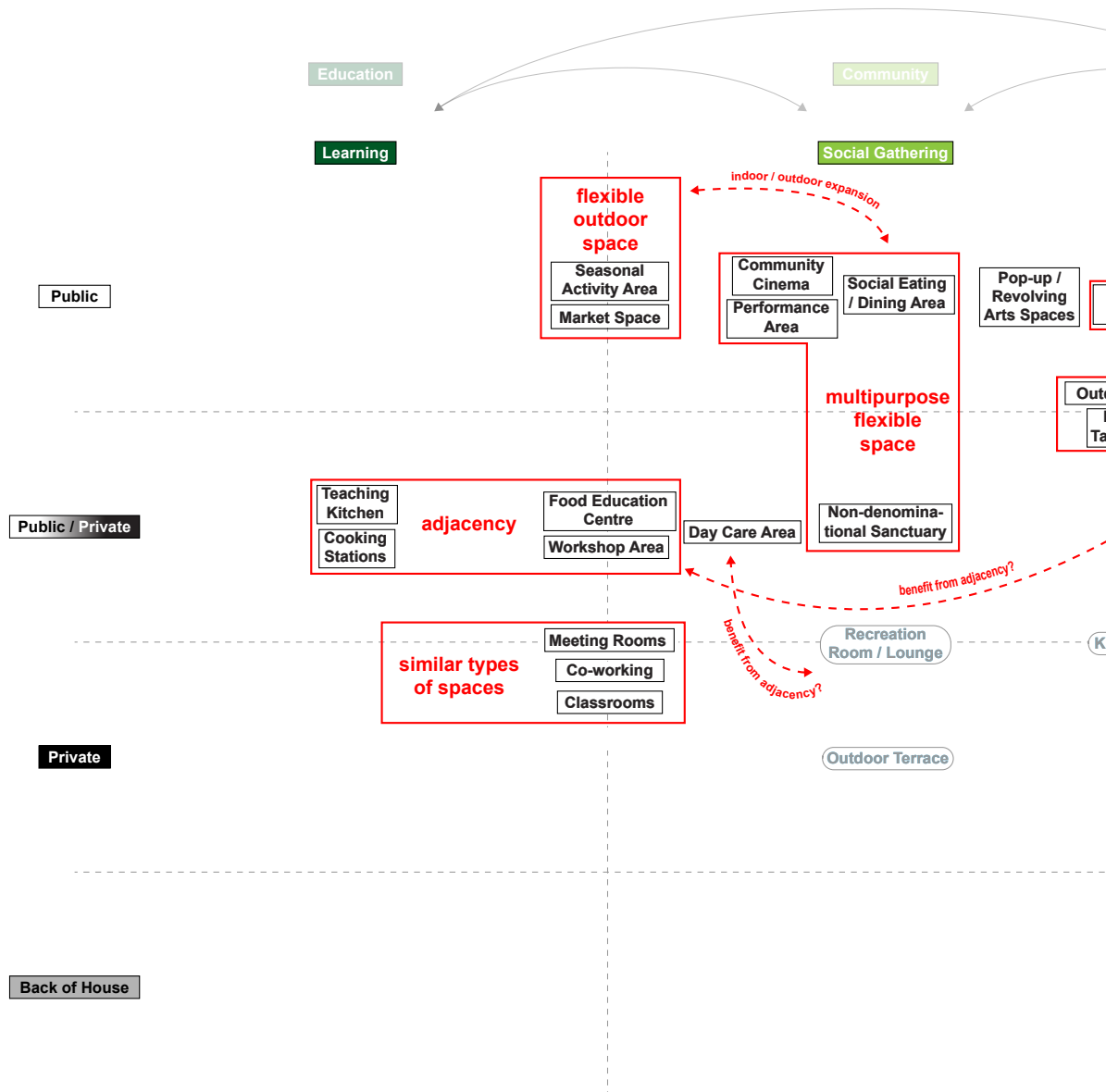
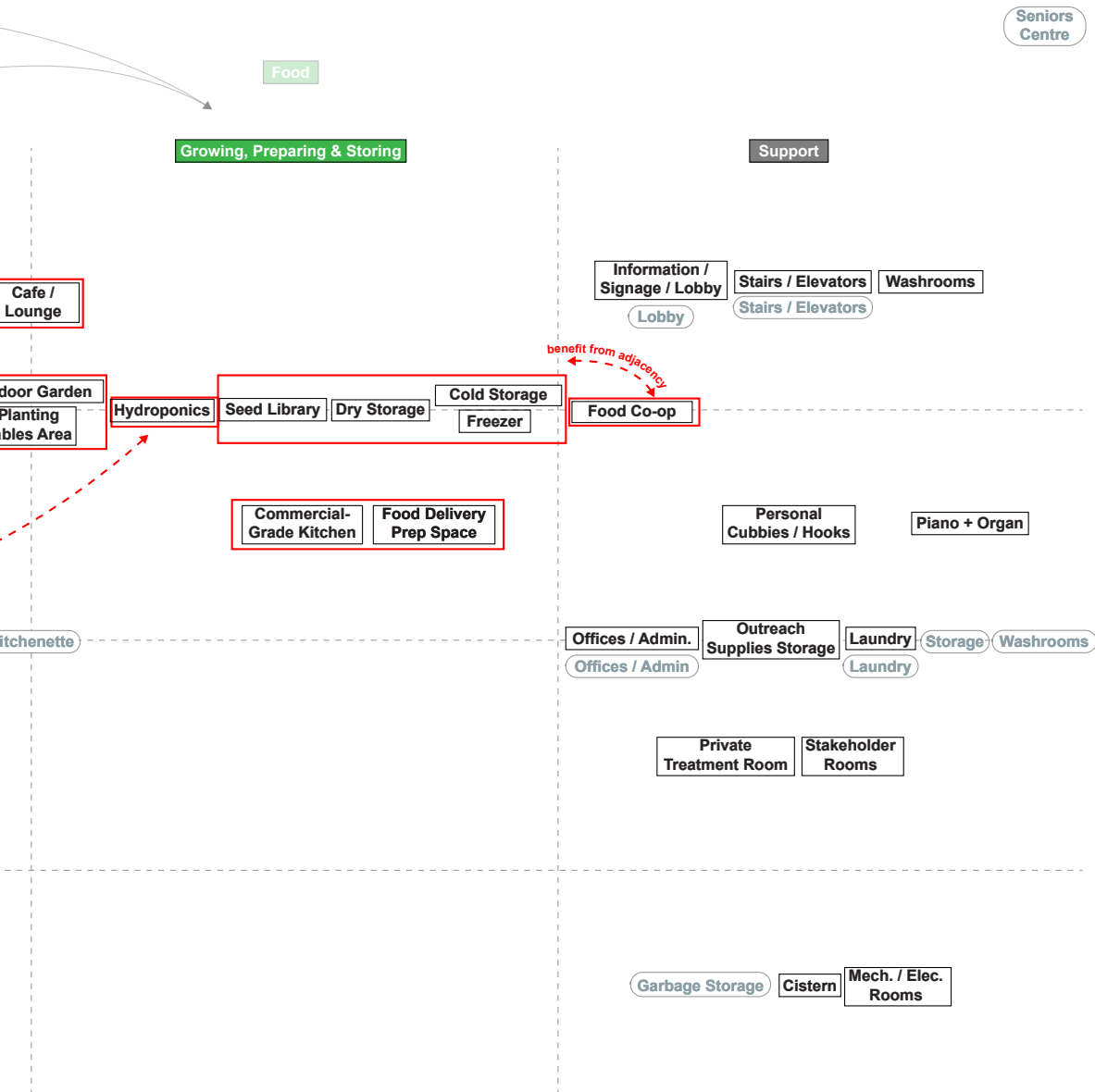
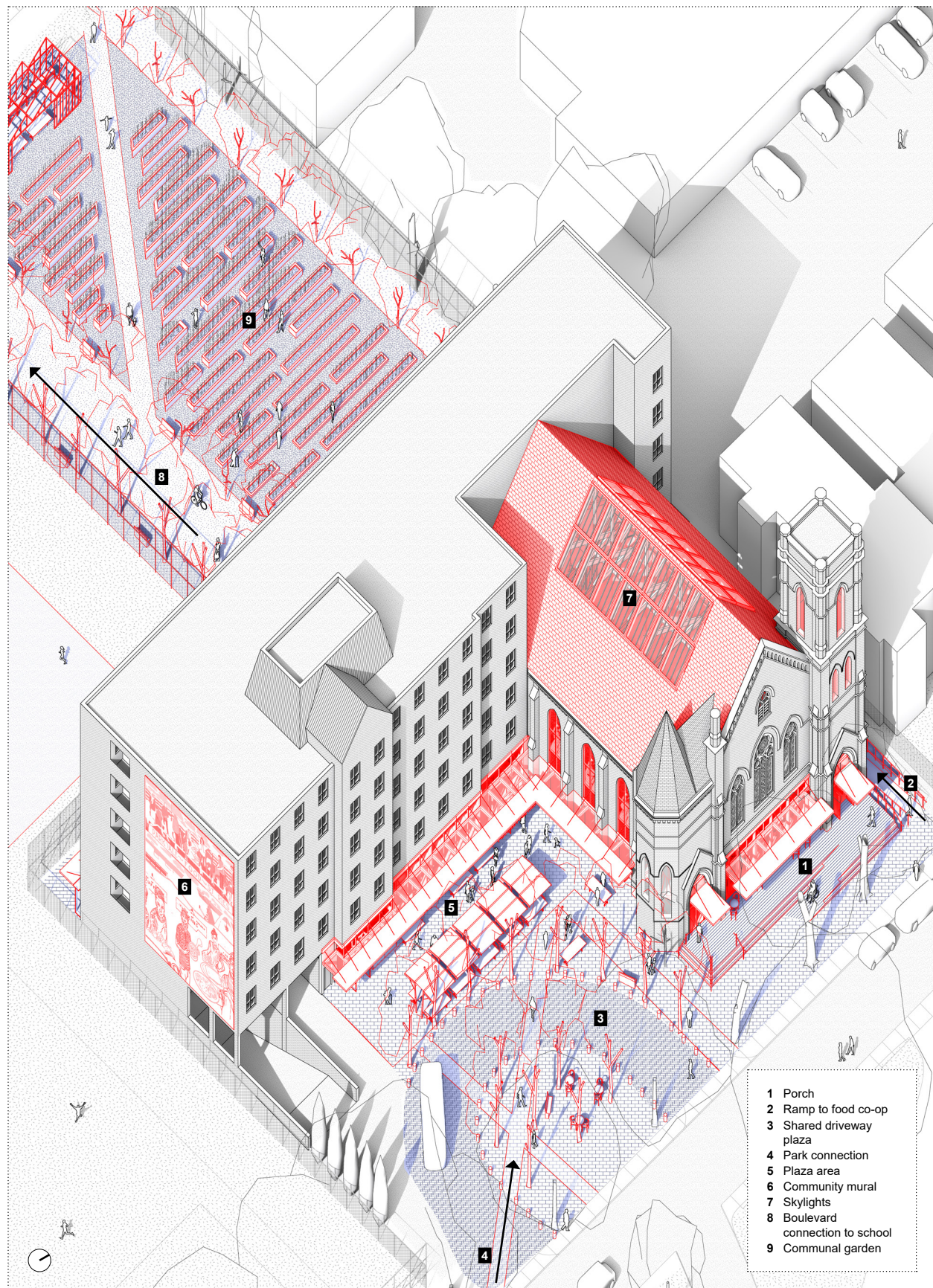


Fig. 5.6 A rough matrix was used to organize the proposed spaces beside the retained ones according to their respective publicness. It helped illustrate those spaces that could benefit from adjacency as well as the multiple activities that could take place in them.





Exterior Revitalization

The proposed changes include areas outside of the original church property to address community goals within the urban fabric. Red and blue tones denote the areas proposed to be changed.

Boulevard connection and communal garden: Through the negotiation of the land currently allotted to the school, the small softball diamond and running track at the back of the church property are shifted southwards for a new pathway to connect directly towards the senior high school. The existing small and underused school garden along the sidewalk is integrated into a larger communal garden; rows of trees and a lightweight garden shed positioned at the street end support the new outdoor spaces. The proposed changes further food security initiatives and provide students and other community patrons with easier access to the revitalized social infrastructure through semi-accessible outdoor space.

Community mural: The southern blank wall of the seniors' addition carries a visual narrative of the neighbourhood's various cultural identities and community values.

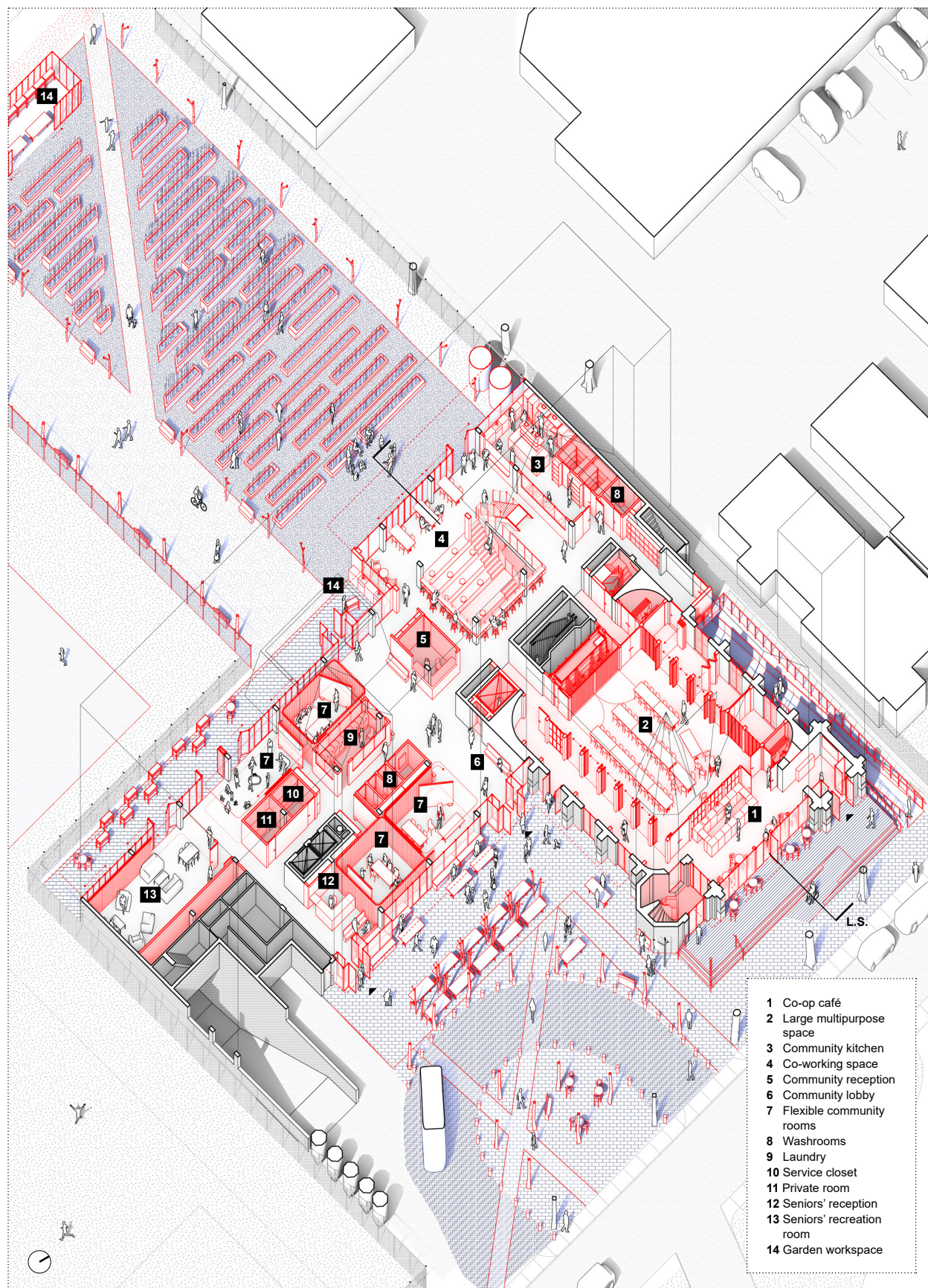
Plaza area: The existing driveway becomes integrated into a multipurpose plaza space by removing its grade changes, mainly between road and curb, into a seamless ground plane. Differences in ground texture and the installation of bollards designate the vehicular route while facilitating a friendlier outdoor area; people can move across the shared street to the entrances of the building more easily. The area directly in front of the existing seniors' addition can be converted into a market through mobile market stalls. New birch trees with tall canopies populate the new plaza, providing ample shade and visual connections across the site; public elements such as repurposed pew benches, tables, and seating are positioned underneath them. Water activation features on the ground provide relief and play for children in the warmer months.

Accessible routes: A new entry to the church building is provided through a generous stramp and gentle stair. A new ramp is carved into the ground at the side of the church to gain discrete access to the programs in the basement.

Church roof upgrade and skylights: The damaged roof is replaced with one that embeds more insulation; new operable skylights are introduced to provide greater control and pleasure within the interior environment.

Modified building envelope: The exterior walls at the ground floor are made more open by introducing new glazing and doorways. The six stained glass windows on the north and south are replaced with more efficient and transparent glazing. An exterior canopy wraps the perimeter to protect users from the sun and rain.

Fig. 5.7 Axonometric illustrating the proposed design interventions in relation to adjacent building context. ←



- 1 Co-op café
- 2 Large multipurpose space
- 3 Community kitchen
- 4 Co-working space
- 5 Community reception
- 6 Community lobby
- 7 Flexible community rooms
- 8 Washrooms
- 9 Laundry
- 10 Service closet
- 11 Private room
- 12 Seniors' reception
- 13 Seniors' recreation room
- 14 Garden workspace

Ground Floor Revitalization

Co-op café: Situated at the front of the church building, this social space provides affordable food and beverage through PPE's Co-op Cred Program. A covered porch with tables and chairs allows users to enjoy their purchases outside.

Large multipurpose space: The existing sanctuary is transformed into a flexible time-sharing atrium space. A new wooden scaffold structure defines new spaces along the perimeter for circulation, storage, and meeting; the atrium and perimeter spaces can remain independent from one another or merge together for larger assembly functions through manually adaptable acoustic shutters. The new structure builds on the rhythm of the existing church structure and further supports it. User groups of different sizes and needs can modify the space arrangement with movable furniture, thus providing various communal scenarios such as for celebration, indoor market, large social dining events, or informal community usage. A retractable stage and moveable indoor bleachers can transform the space for performance, lecture, or theatre functions. A new durable polished concrete floor is inserted level with the existing building addition for greater accessibility and usage.

Community kitchen: A transparent, commercially fitted kitchen with walk-in freezer and fridge rooms provides the community with space to prepare larger meals for hot meal programs and social dining events and provides access to kitchen resources that may not be readily available in their own households. A serving hatch provides easier access for food distribution and meals on the go.

Co-working space: Multiple areas for sitting, such as a seated stair and movable tables and chairs, provide temporary workspace for groups and individuals.

Community lobby: A generous lobby space with seating contains a community reception that provides information about the scheduling of programs and spaces. A new elevator gives access to spaces in the basement and second floor.

Flexible community rooms: A continuous open space is installed with movable curtains to adjust privacy, if required; the existing seniors' recreation room is similarly modified to provide opportunities for connecting closer with the community. Movable partitions provide a vertical surface to pin up, display, or further divide space within the open area, and movable furniture allows for various spatial arrangements. Perimeter storage compartments hold various community items for accessible facilitation of activities.

Modified support spaces: Shared support functions such as washrooms and the laundry room are reconfigured in the layout.

Fig. 5.8 Axonometric illustrating the proposed design interventions on the ground floor. ←

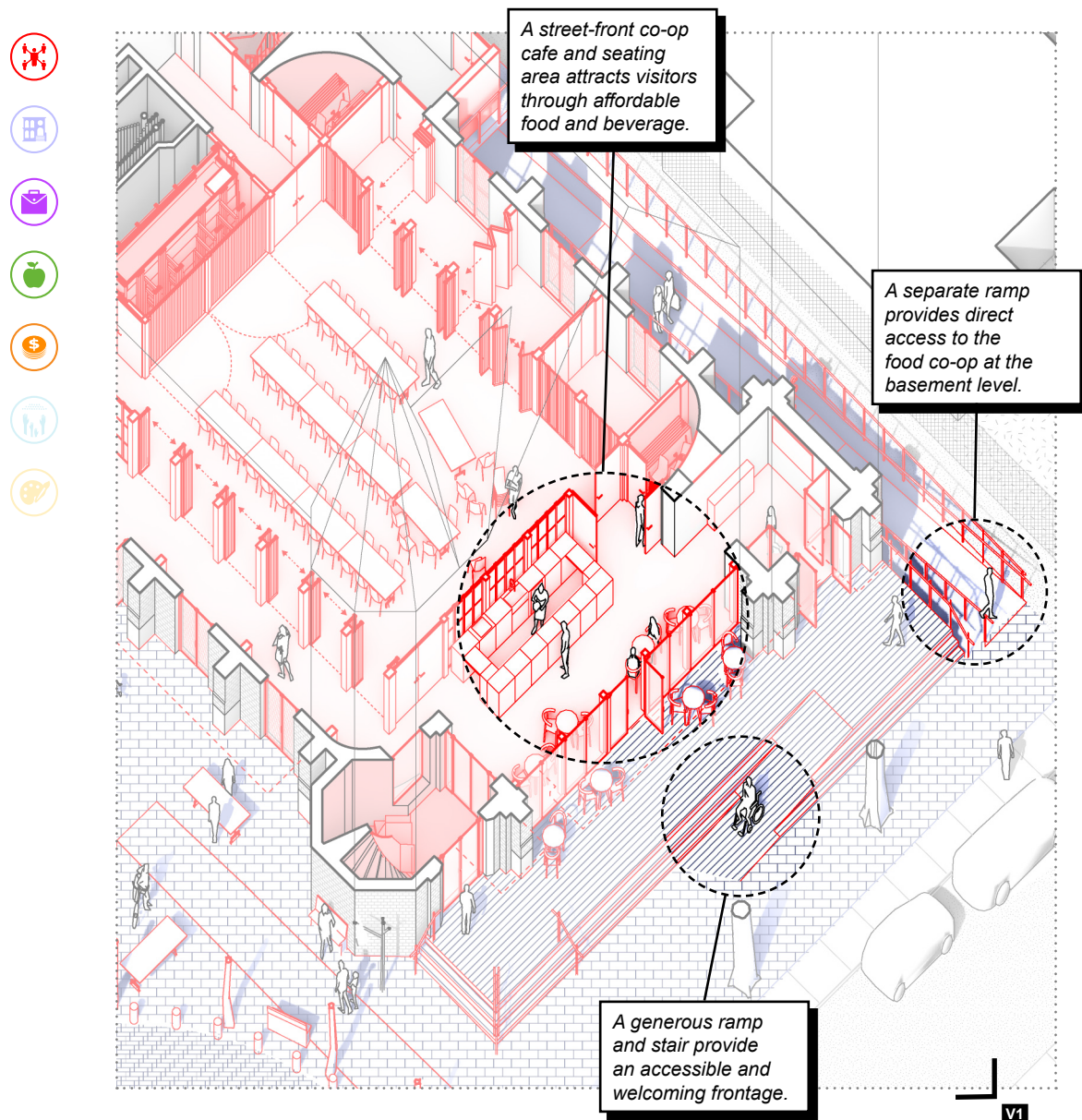


Fig. 5.9 Ground floor axonometric highlighting various user experiences of the revitalization near the front of the church building.



V1

Fig. 5.10 View of the church building porch in the event of an evening performance.

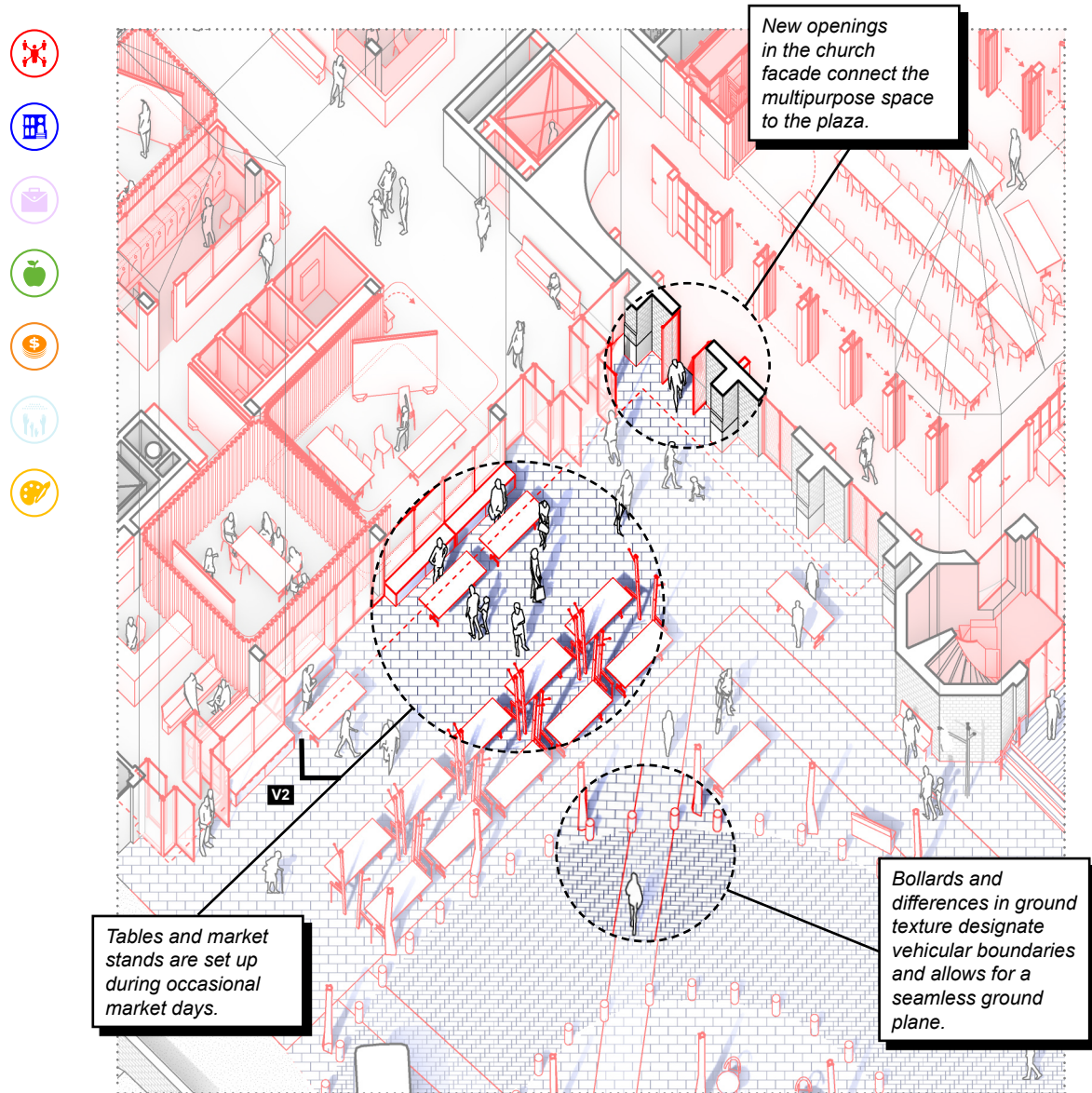


Fig. 5.11 Ground floor axonometric highlighting various user experiences of the revitalization in the public outdoor area.



V2

Fig. 5.12 View of the plaza area towards the church building in the event of an outdoor market.

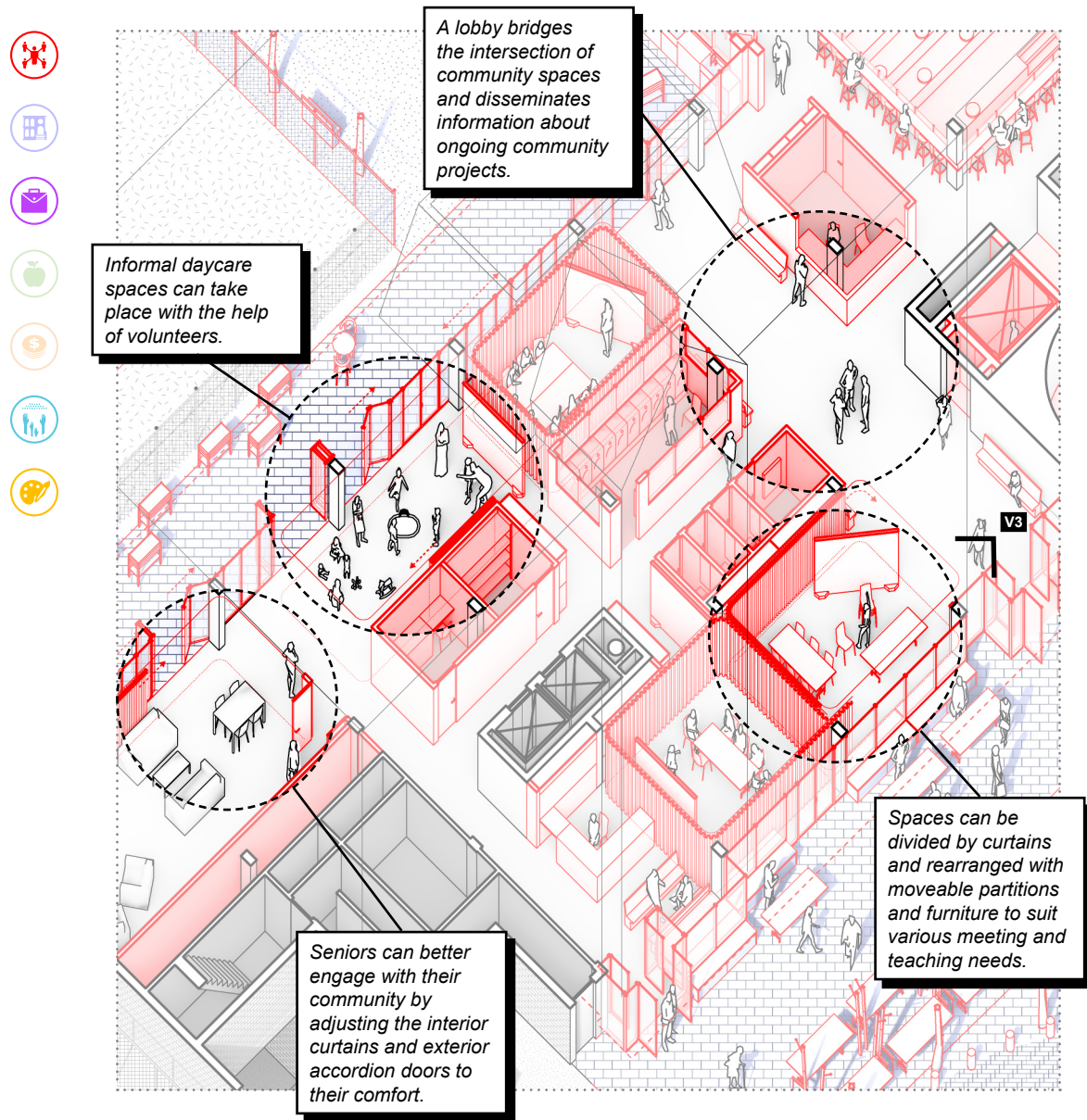


Fig. 5.13 Ground floor axonometric highlighting various user experiences near the seniors' area.



V3

Fig. 5.14 View towards the flexible community rooms from the community lobby in a teaching scenario.

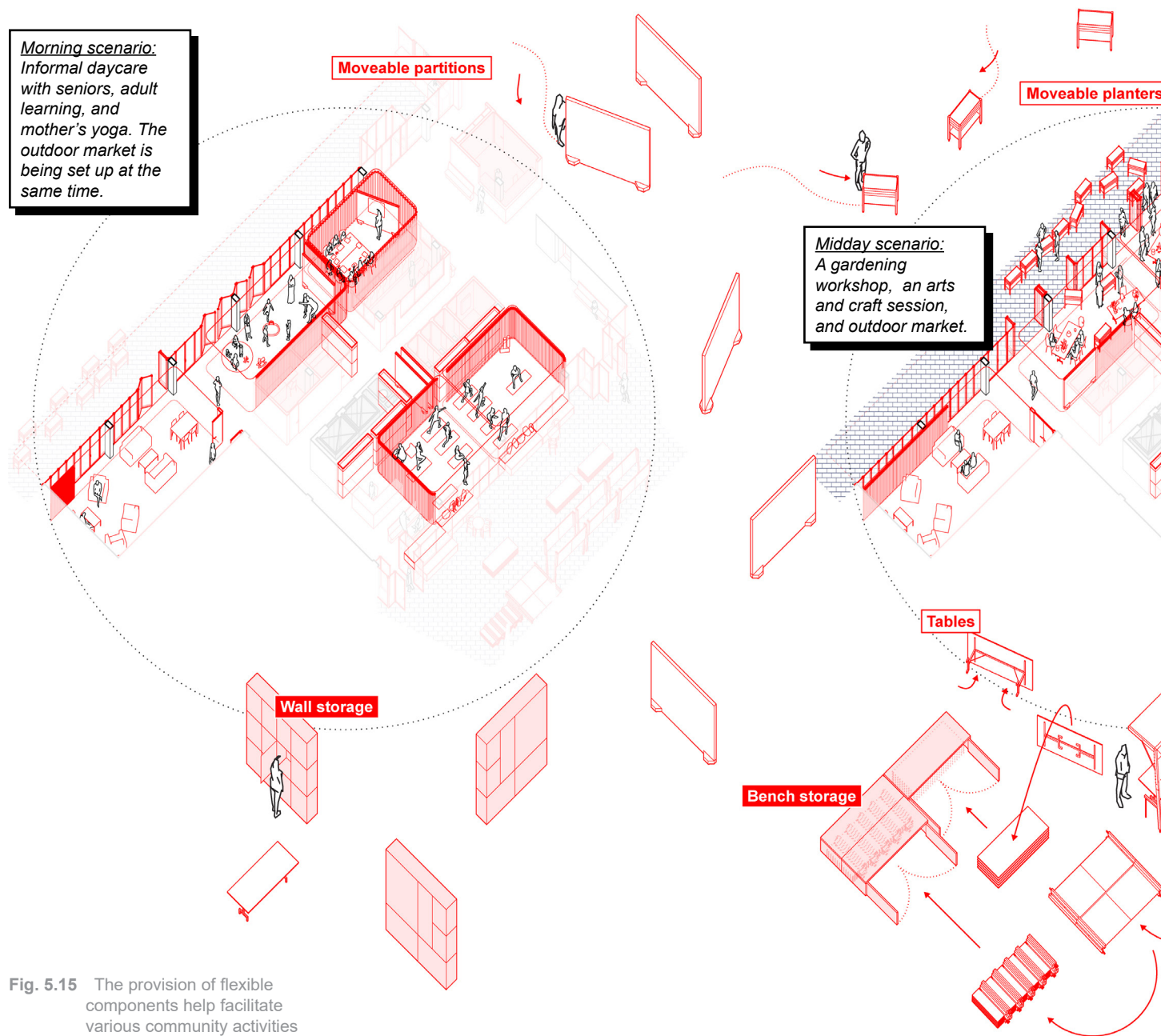
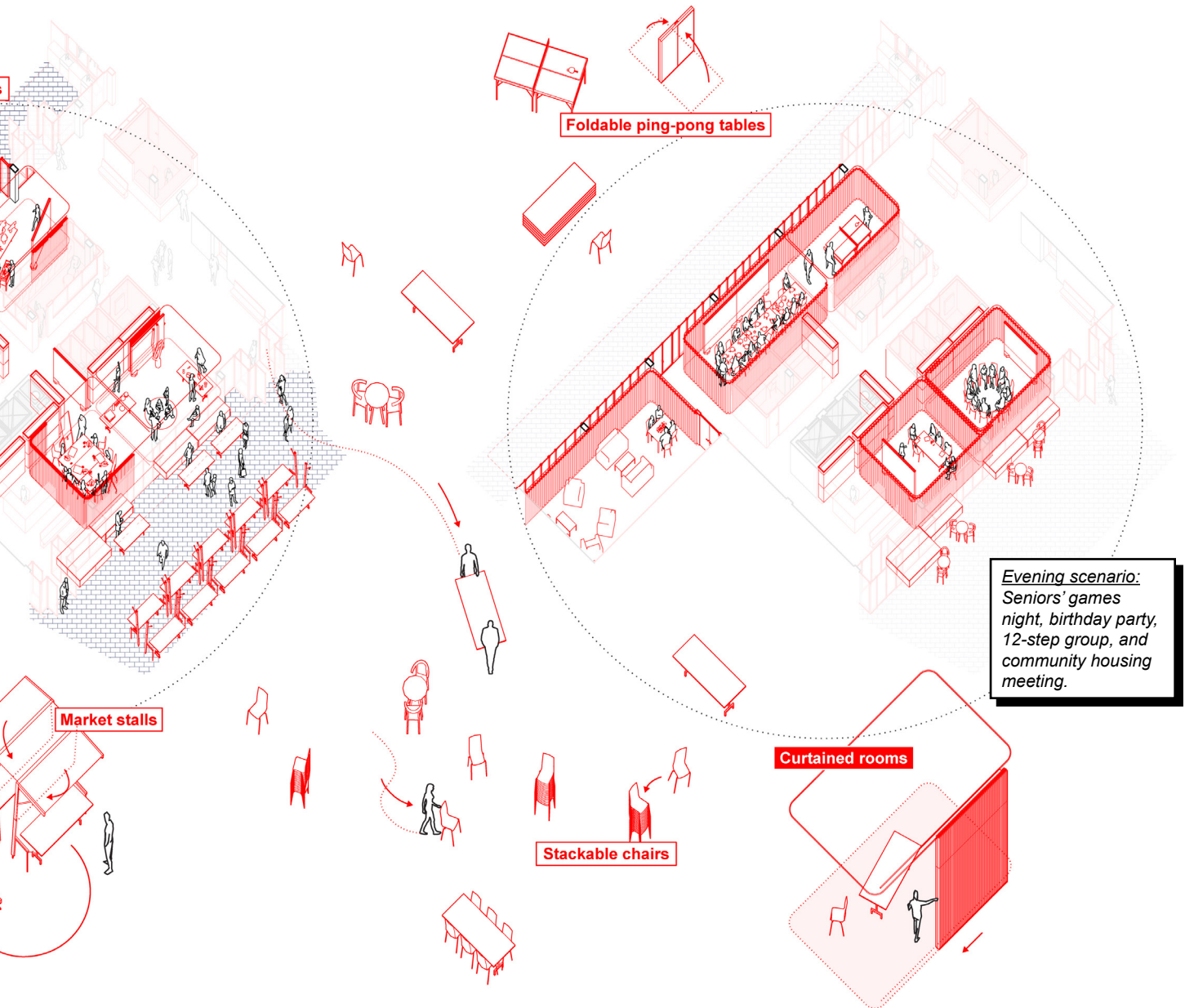


Fig. 5.15 The provision of flexible components help facilitate various community activities throughout the day. The demountable market stalls are inspired by those used in Piazza San Cosimato.



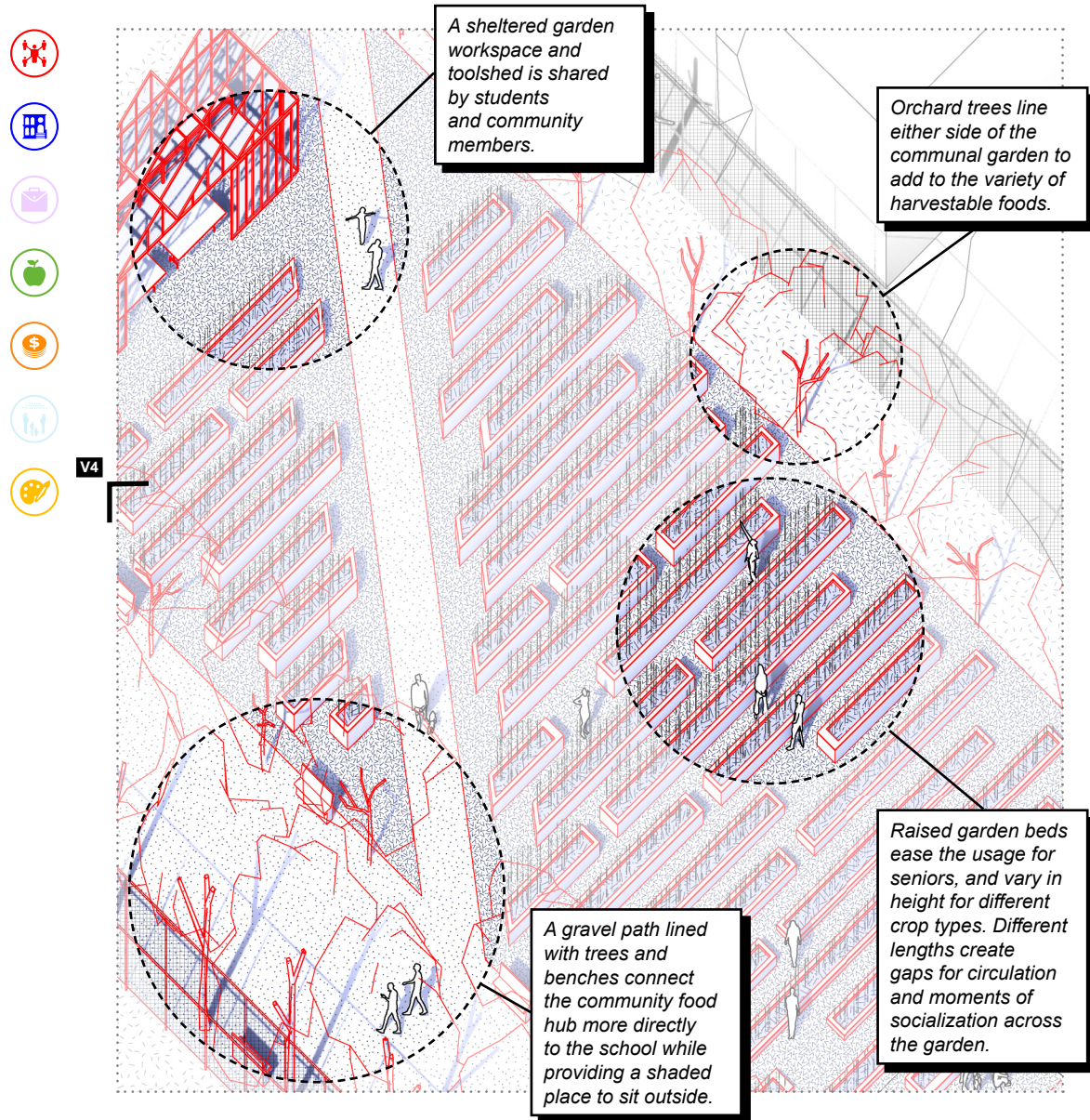


Fig. 5.16 Ground floor axonometric highlighting various user experiences around the communal garden.



V4

Fig. 5.17 View from the communal garden towards the revitalized building.

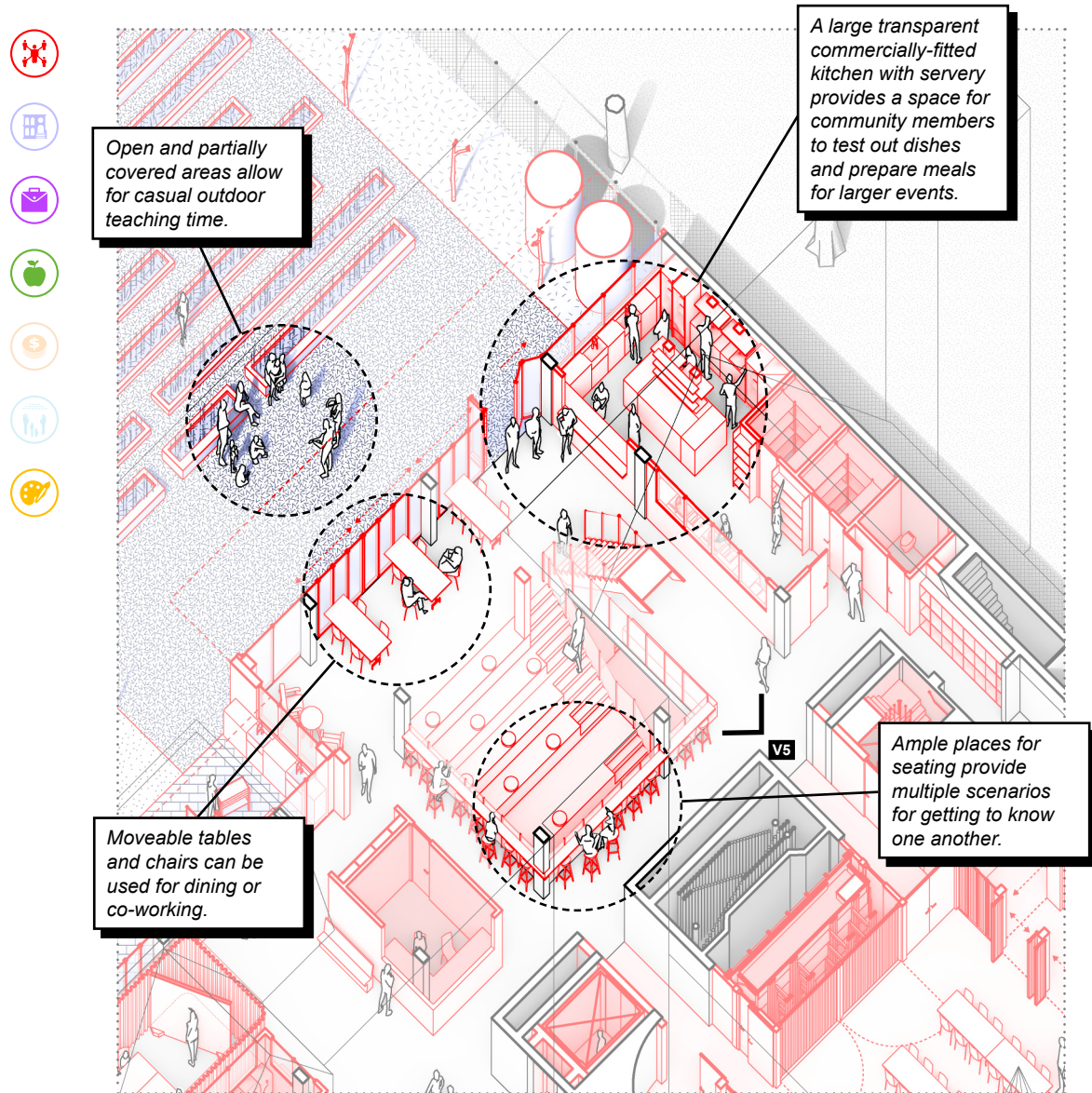
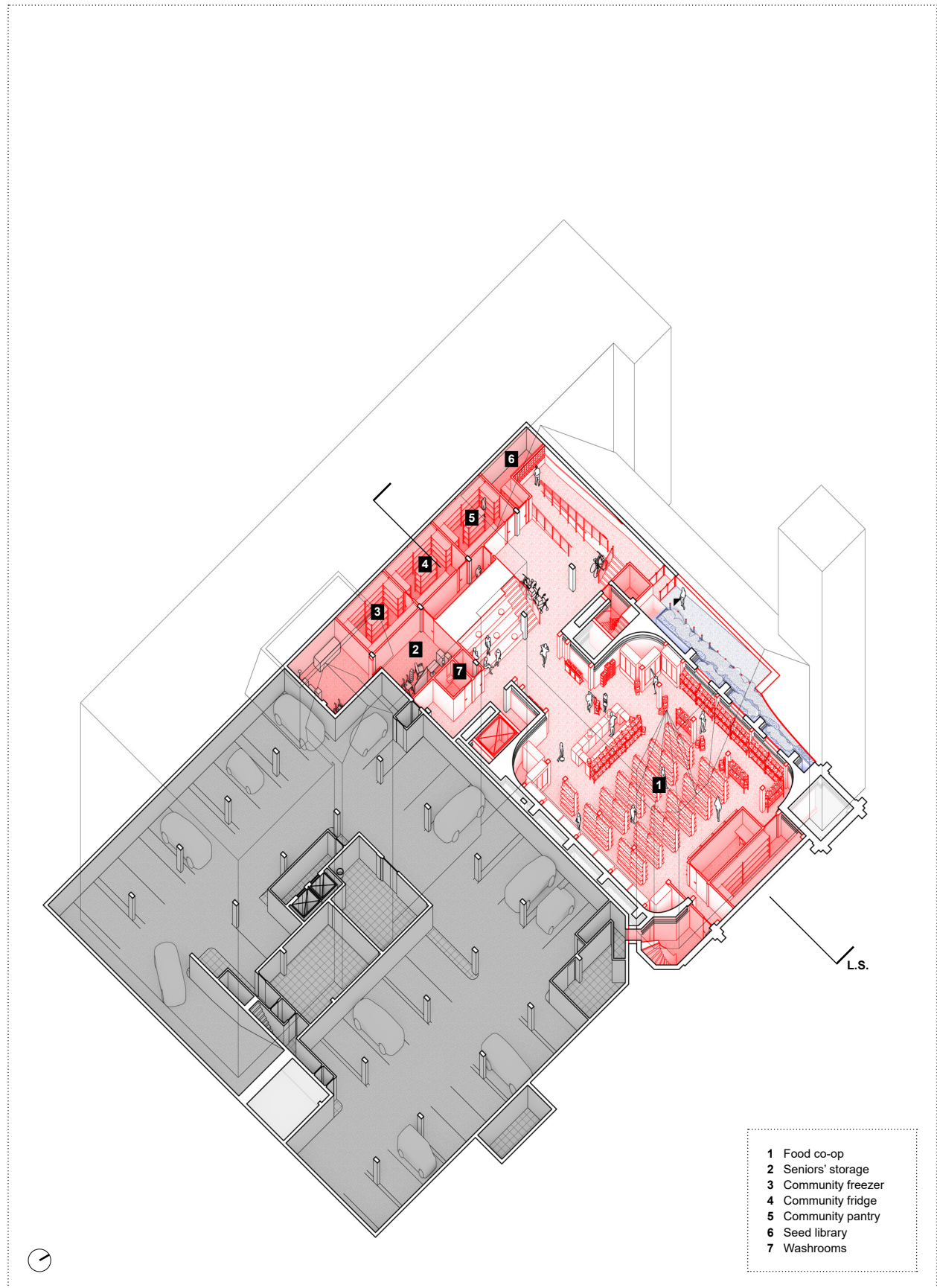


Fig. 5.18 Ground floor axonometric highlighting various user experiences in the food corner area.



V5

Fig. 5.19 View from the food corner atrium towards the community garden, with the seated stair and commercial kitchen on either side.



Basement Revitalization

Food co-op: The community-run grocery store contains member-selected ethnic foods and produce, housed in a new sanctuary basement heightened via structural underpinning. New windows are introduced beside the new opening created by the accessible ramp at the side of the church building. The basement floor is level with the seniors' addition, providing new accessible connections. If the tenancy of the food co-op proves to be financially difficult, a large multipurpose space will still be left in its place.

Shared storage spaces: Several spaces, including a walk-in pantry, fridge, and freezer rooms, provide shared rooms to store food from donations, the community garden, or the food co-op; the existing seniors' storage is maintained away from public areas. A seed library location is introduced along the accessible ramp for people to exchange seeds for their gardens.

Seated stair: A new opening through the ground floor provides direct vertical circulation, natural light, and increased opportunities for informal socialization. An area for temporary bike and stroller storage is found beside it.

Fig. 5.20 Axonometric illustrating the proposed design interventions on the basement floor. ←

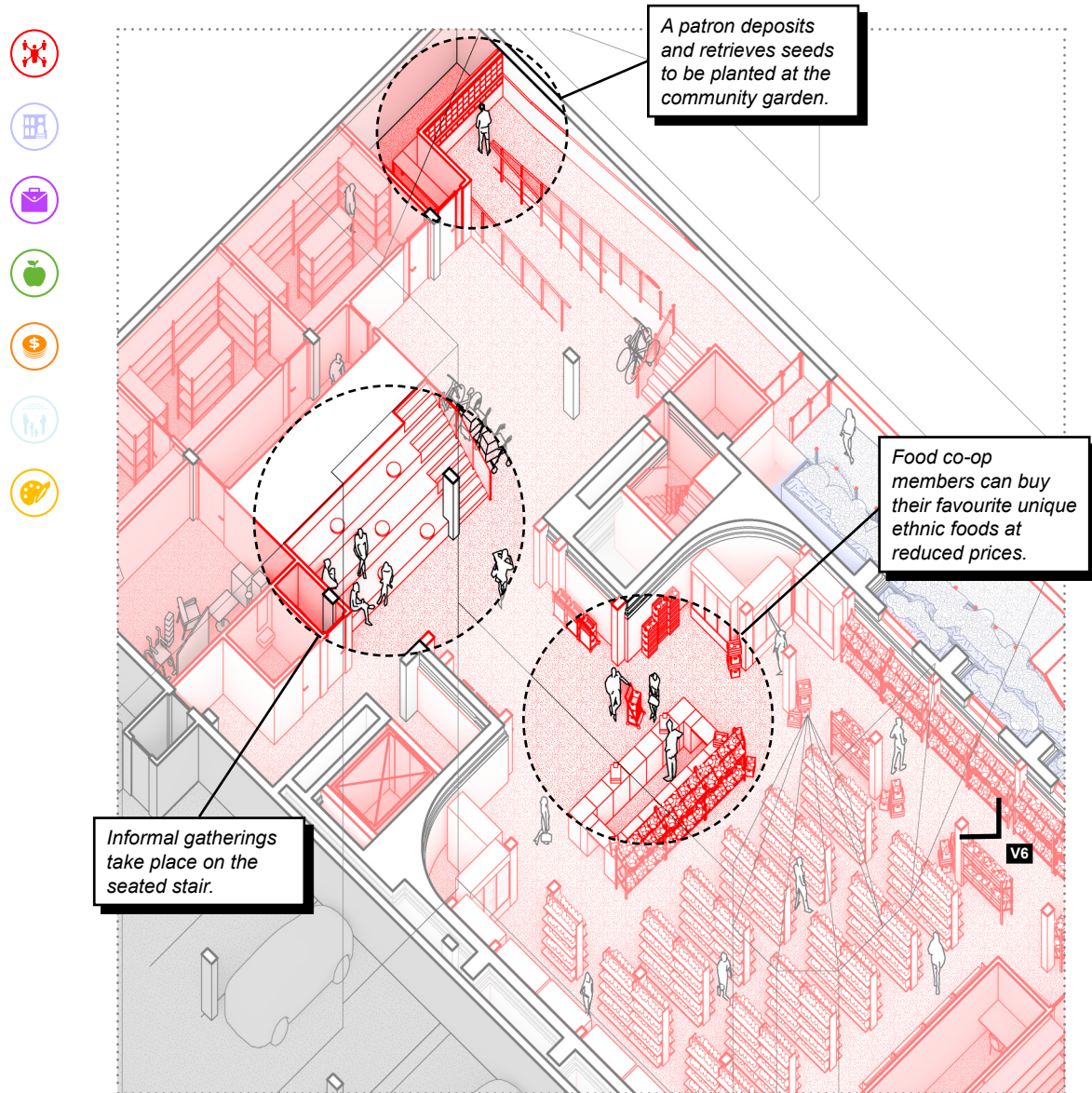


Fig. 5.21 Basement floor axonometric highlighting various user experiences within the building.



V6

Fig. 5.22 View from food co-op aisles with the seated stair in the background.



Second Floor Revitalization

Multipurpose mezzanine: The wooden scaffold structure holds a mezzanine floor that wraps around the central atrium of the large multipurpose space, providing circulation to other gathering rooms and moments for private socialization. More of the same user-adjustable acoustic shutters continued from the ground floor further control visual and auditory connections between spaces. Large adaptable accordion walls at either end of the atrium can similarly be adjusted to control the visual, acoustic, and spatial environment; the existing organ is retained and can be made included in or hidden in the atrium space.

Gathering spaces: Several different-sized rooms provide further places for smaller community meetings. The medium-sized gathering space by the façade of the church can be open or closed to the atrium through the large accordion walls. Smaller, more private rooms are also available, with one accessed a level above.

Teaching kitchen: The mezzanine extends to the seniors' addition side to include a transparent space dedicated for the community to learn how to cook and prepare food. Adjustable cooking stations, like those used in the Hackney School of Food, permit users to be more comfortable; social activities including cooking and pickling workshops can take place here.

Hydroponics area: The mezzanine is further extended to include a glazed space dedicated to the indoor production of small leafy greens and herbs. A demonstration area allows people to learn how to start their own hydroponics at home during educational workshops.

Fig. 5.23 Axonometric illustrating the proposed design interventions on the second floor. ←

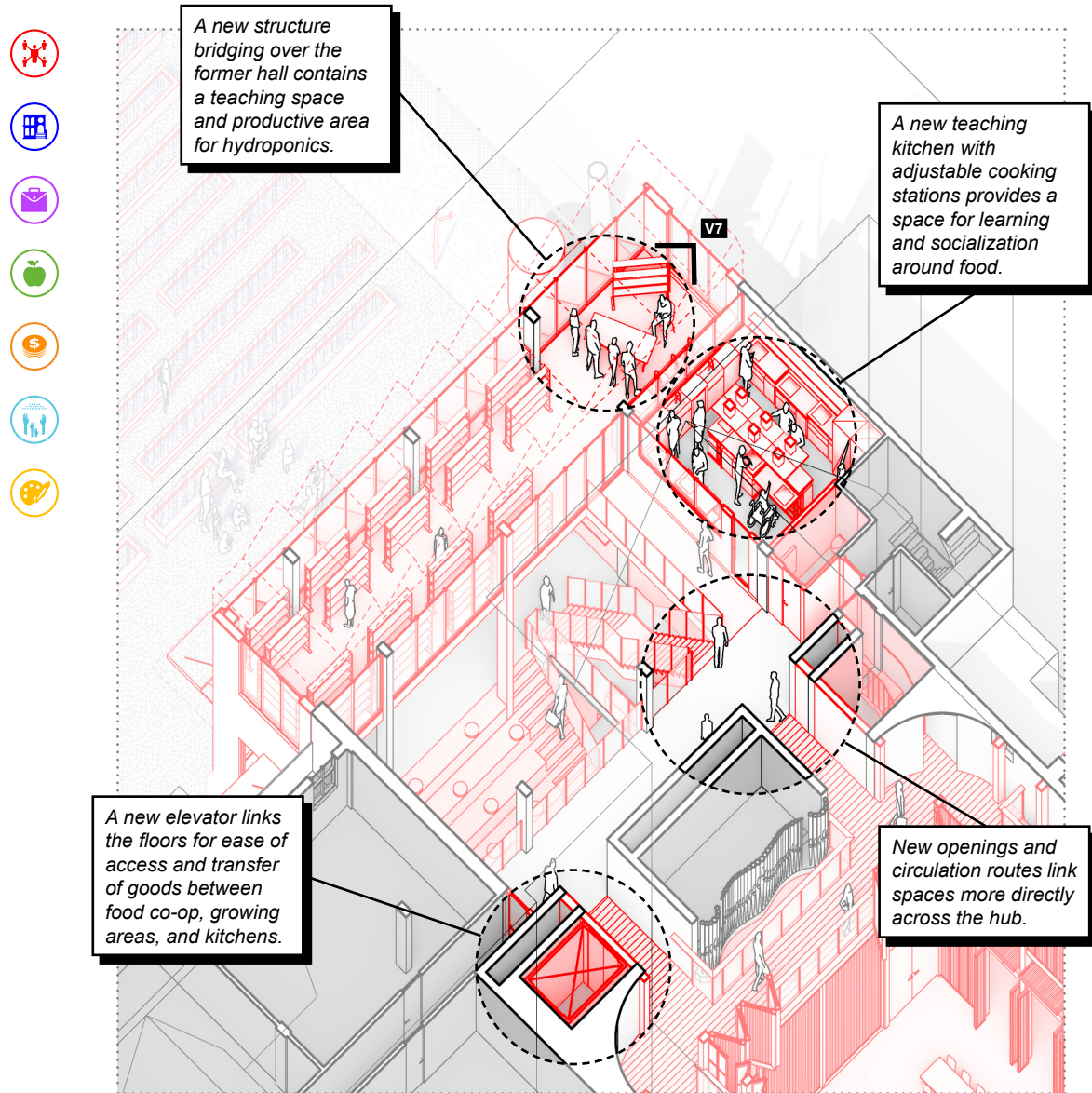


Fig. 5.24 Second floor axonometric highlighting various user experiences around the food corner.



V7

Fig. 5.25 View inside the hydroponics area.

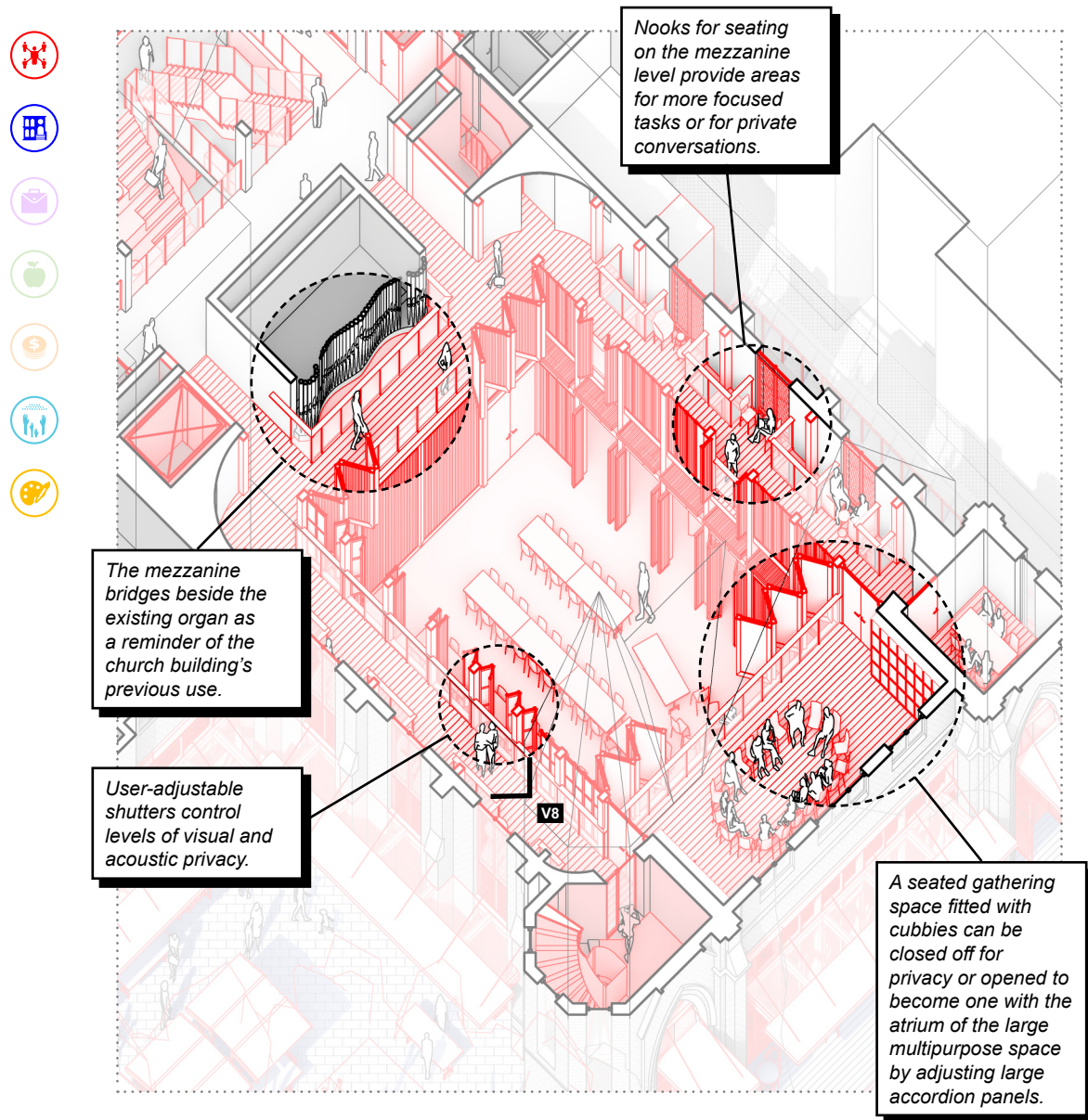


Fig. 5.26 Second floor axonometric highlighting various user experiences around the large multipurpose space.



V8

Fig. 5.27 The mezzanine level provides moments for more intimate social meetings while serving as circulation to other community spaces. The visual connection to the outdoor plaza is strengthened, and visual opportunities are maintained to the large multipurpose space below.

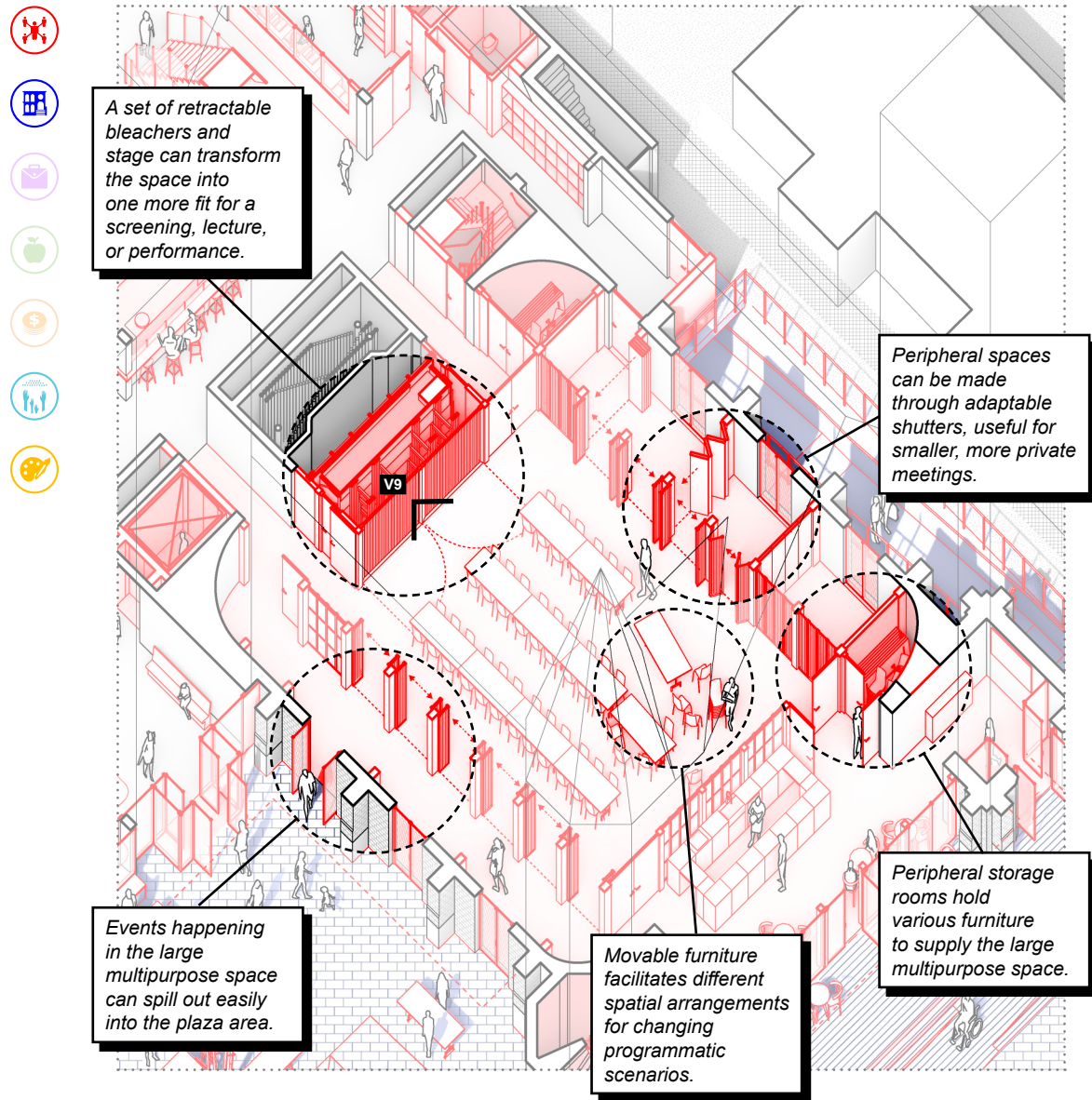


Fig. 5.28 Ground floor axonometric highlighting various user experiences around the large multipurpose space.



V9

Fig. 5.29 View of the large multipurpose space during relaxed community usage.

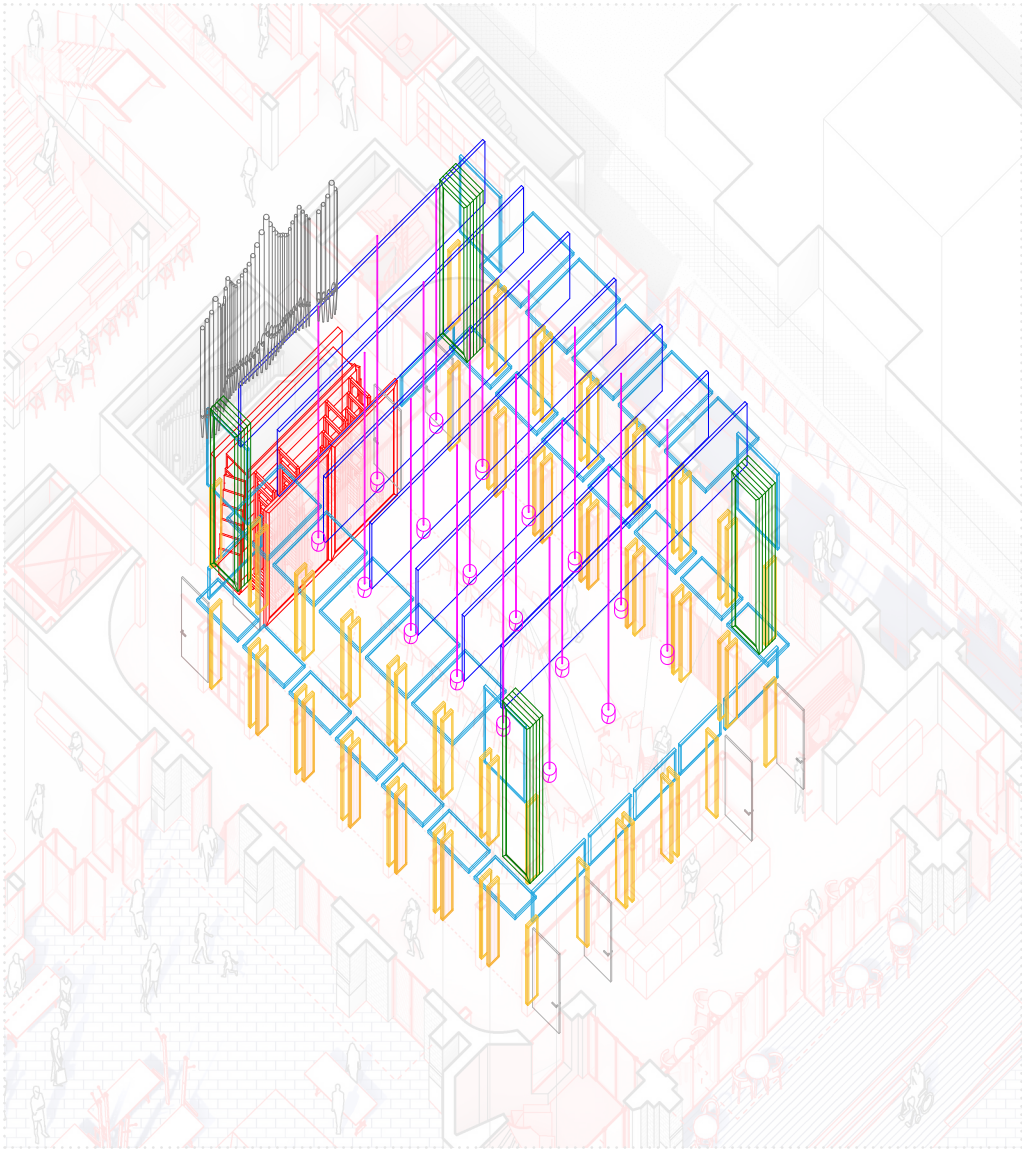


Fig. 5.30 Adaptable components of the large multipurpose space.*

Adaptable atrium: A system of adaptable shutters, accordion walls, and rotating ceiling baffles transforms the interior environment of the large multipurpose space. The ceiling baffles control the amount of natural light that enters from the operable skylights above and can acoustically seal the space during noisier events. A system of tracks holds retractable lights that are brought down during evening programs.

*The colours used here do not correlate with the colours used for PPE's seven key action areas. The same comment applies to the diagrams that follow.

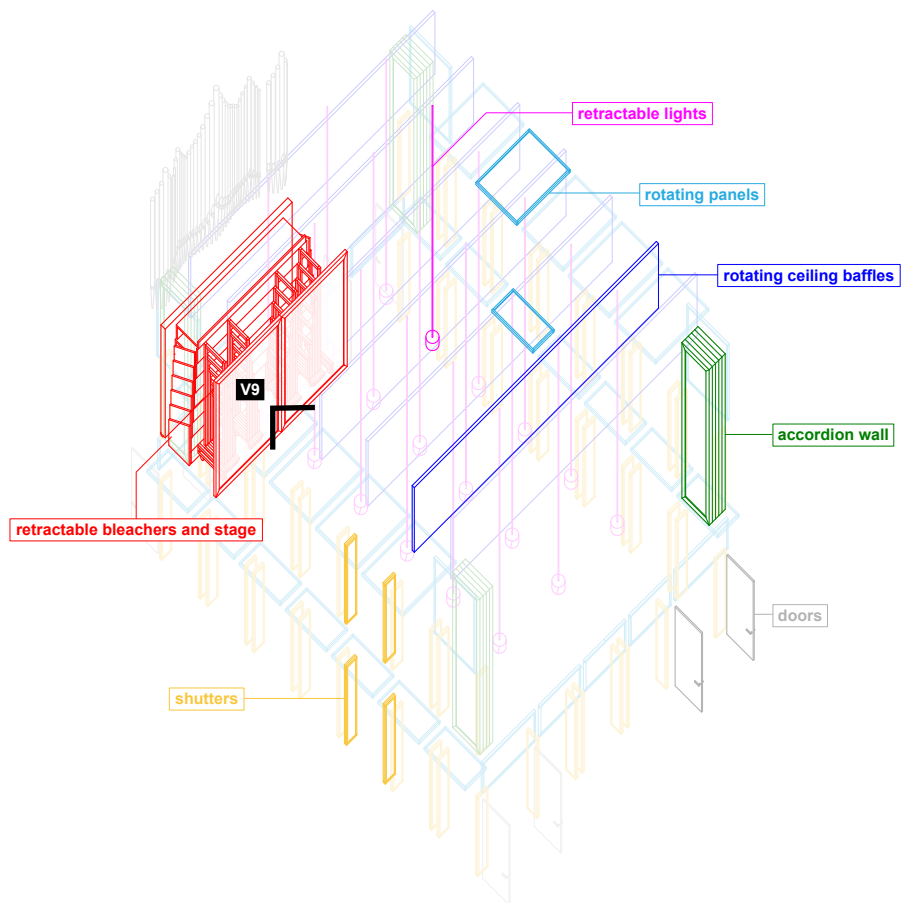


Fig. 5.31 Adaptable components of the large multipurpose space labelled, shown open.



V9

Fig. 5.32 View of the large multipurpose space during a social dining event.

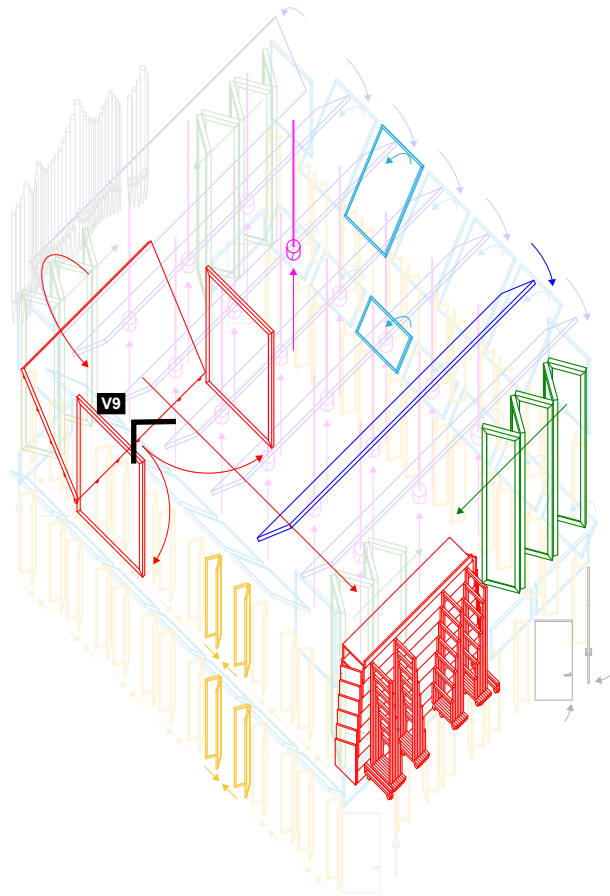


Fig. 5.33 Adaptable components of the large multipurpose space in their midway state.



V9

Fig. 5.34 View of the large multipurpose space in transition.

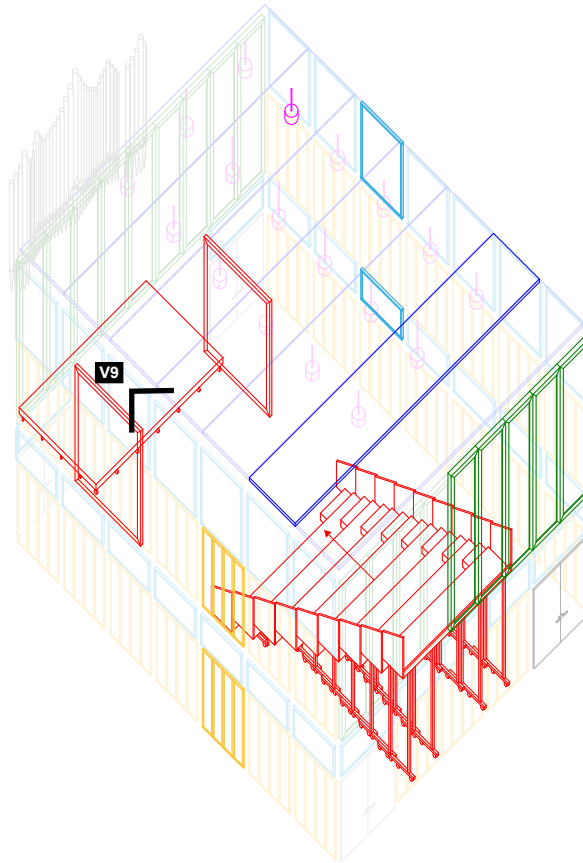


Fig. 5.35 Adaptable components of the large multipurpose space labelled, shown closed.



V9

Fig. 5.36 View of the large multipurpose space during an educational learning session.

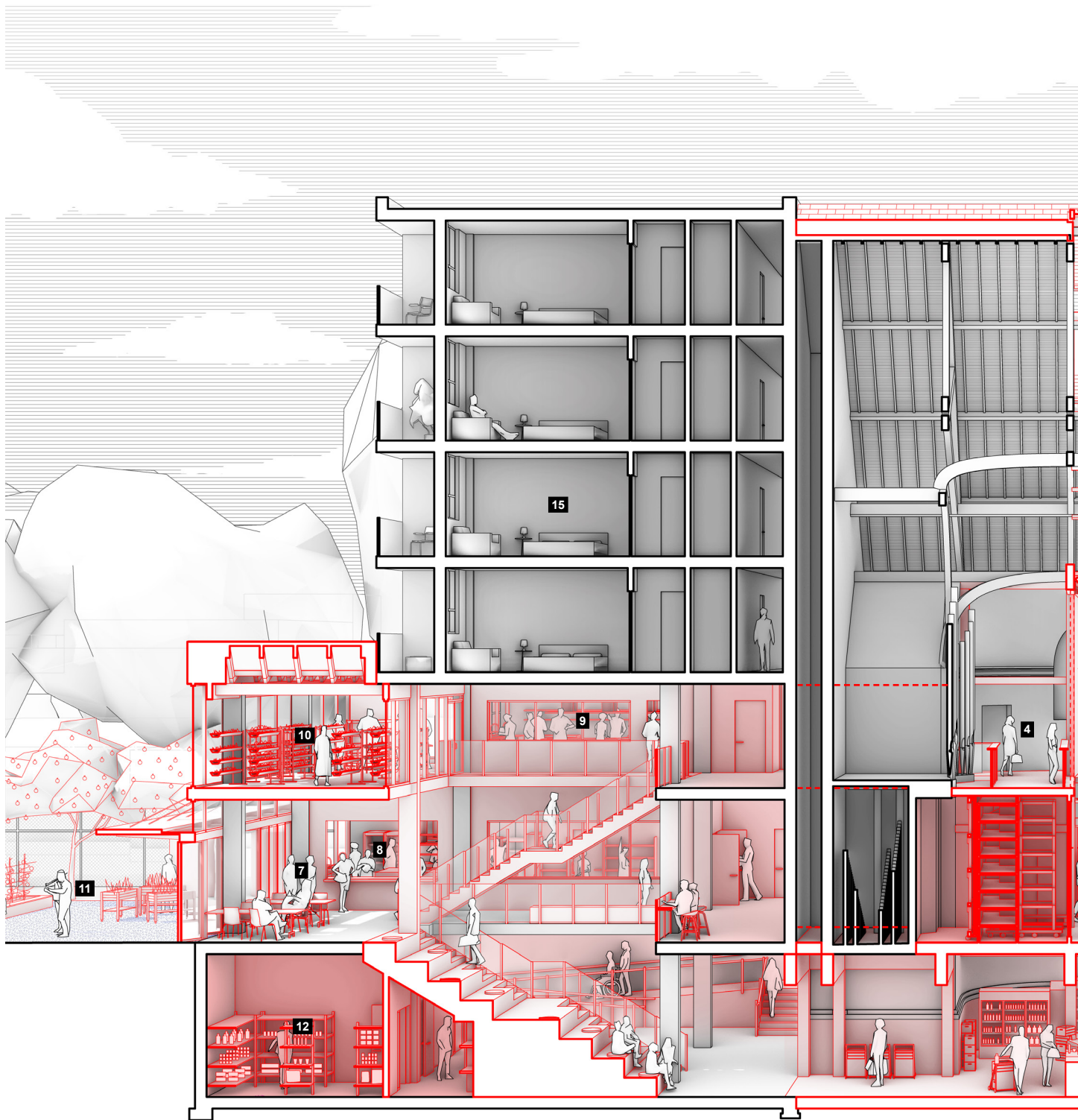
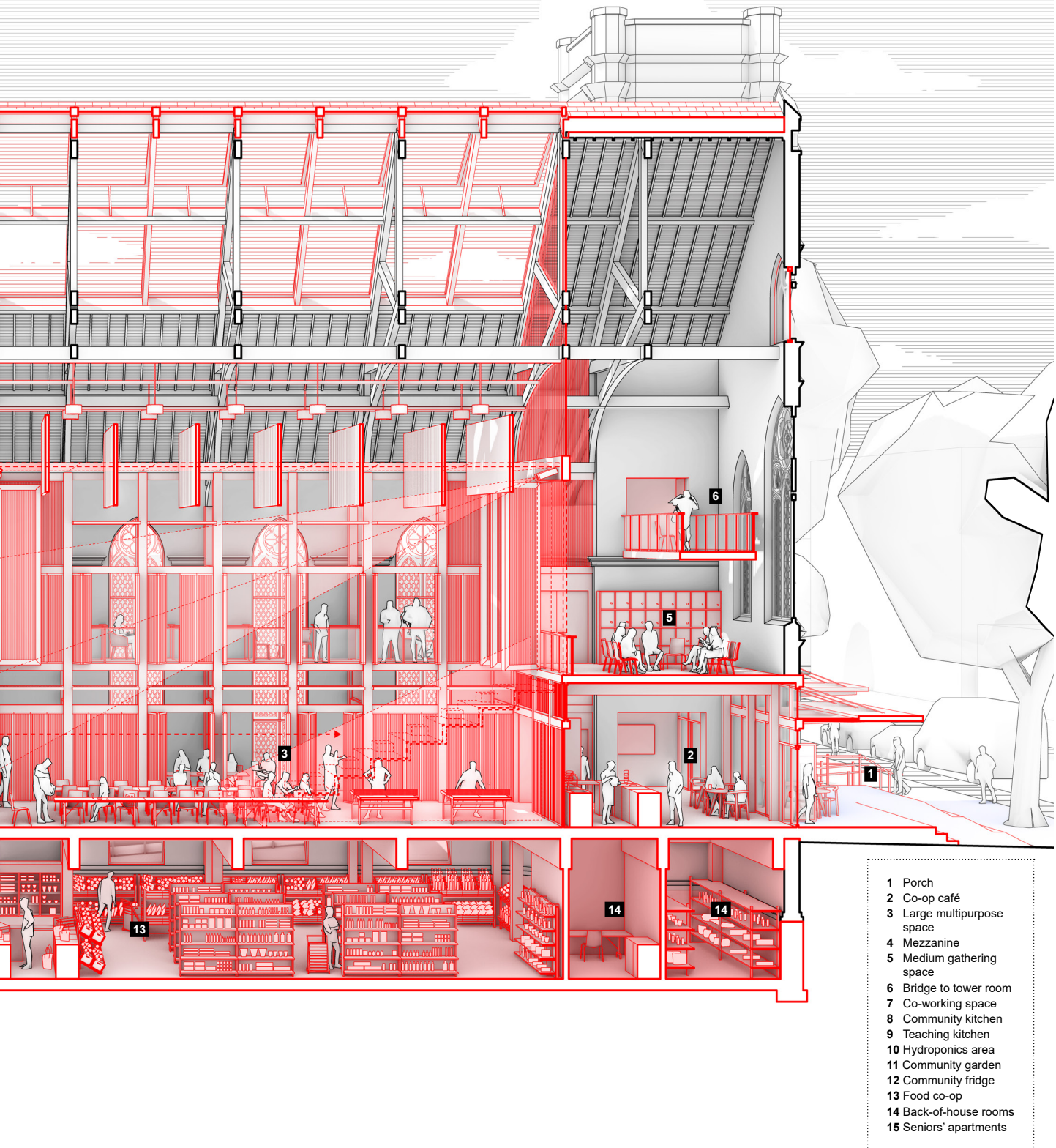


Fig. 5.37 Longitudinal section of the revitalized building; the large multipurpose space depicts a largely-opened configuration of adaptable components in a casual community scenario.



Conclusion



Where do we go from here? ...

Reflections

“The measure of engaged preservation’s success will be its capacity to deal with material and social imperatives holistically; to advance community development, building performance, and cultural relevance by leveraging the different potentials of heritage places; and to weave historic places and narratives back into the fabric of communities and regions.”¹⁷⁶

- Randall Mason, “Engaged Preservation”

Within the 2022 *Space for Community* report on social infrastructure, two research projects were carried out to gain a deeper understanding of how social infrastructure is understood across the general public. The first, an international review of social infrastructure through a literature review and in-depth interviews with global participants, resulted in six common themes: *openness of purpose* (i.e., multipurpose, flexible spaces); *connectivity*; *community voice*; *connecting with the natural world*; *social infrastructure as resistance*; and *inclusion of some is exclusion of others*.¹⁷⁷ The second, a peer research project focused on understanding community perspectives of social infrastructure in England, highlighted that *inclusion and diversity, accessibility, ownership and belonging, and green spaces* are crucial components of social infrastructure.¹⁷⁸

One can argue that the adaptation proposed for BPPC addresses all these themes to various degrees. The design proposal of a community food hub embedded with flexibility was informed by South Parkdale’s specific community needs, which were made clear through the previous research of community advocate organizations such as PPE. PPE’s community reports were crucial to understanding the community; the information provided helped further the social agenda originally set out in the thesis and deeply informed the design speculation.

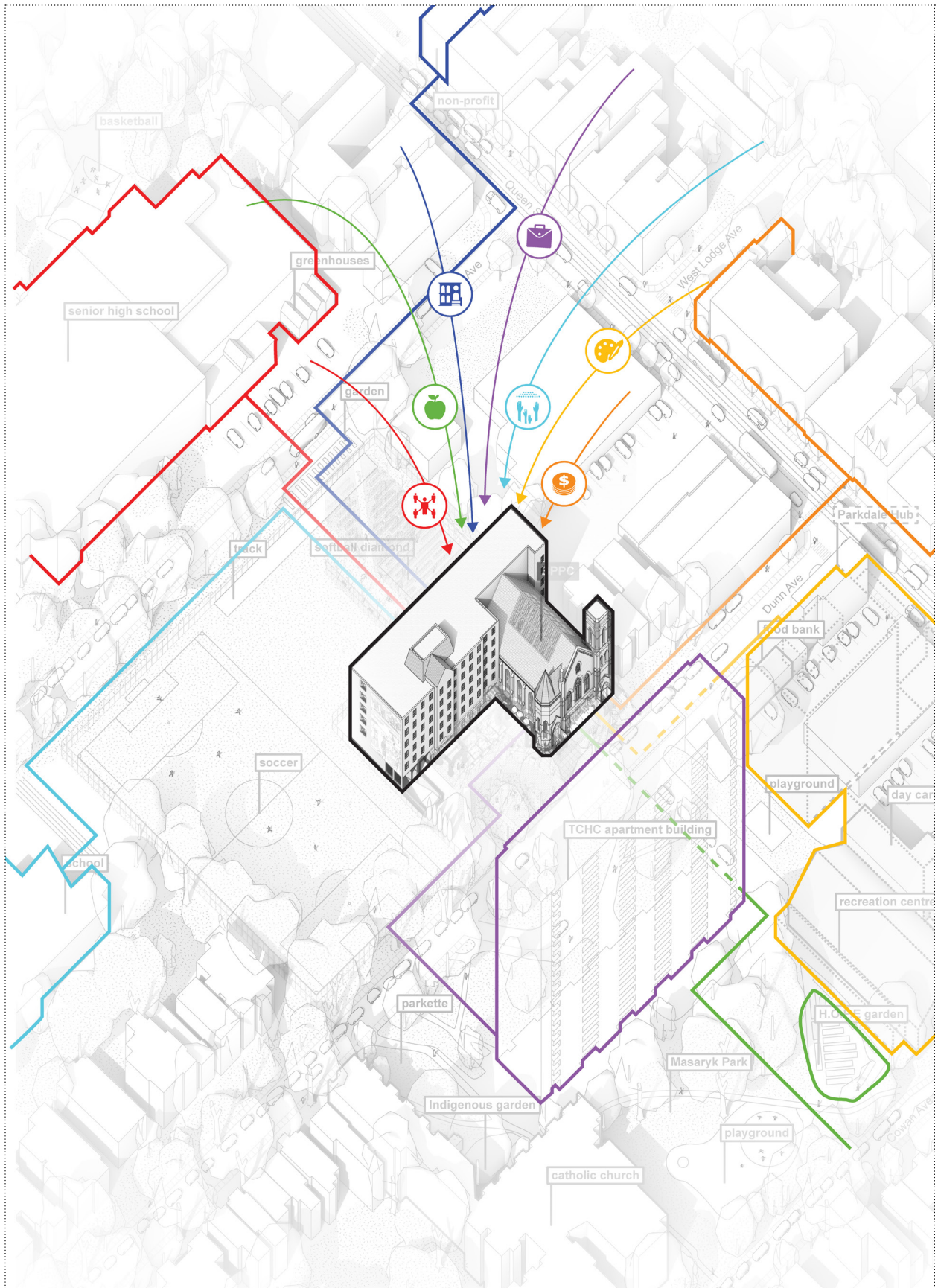
However, most neighbourhoods do not have such great community support. The advancement of social infrastructure projects as proposed in this thesis may be more difficult to achieve without the community information and support that is so readily abundant and available within South

Fig. 6.1 View of the north facade of BPPC. ←

¹⁷⁶ Randall Mason, “Engaged Preservation,” *Journal of Architectural Education* 72, no. 2 (2018): 203, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10464883.2018.1496727>.

¹⁷⁷ The British Academy and Power to Change, *Space for Community*, 9.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid.



Parkdale. The methods of social infrastructure mapping and understanding of the physical context through site visits and photography grounded these realities more clearly. Designing for social infrastructure requires that these elements are present so that solutions can develop in tune with a community's needs. The methods used to understand social infrastructure for BPPC's revitalization proposal could be employed in other projects looking to introduce locally driven social infrastructure into their own neighbourhoods, or for other underused churches seeking to create more meaningful community-oriented transformations.

The research into social infrastructure would not have been advanced upon if not for the historical social role of churches and church buildings. Despite the declining influence of religion in Canada, it is important to note that church buildings are still considered as vital social infrastructure, in different communities and to different degrees. Christian worshippers still exist; some worship weekly, some daily. The supply of church buildings adds to the diversity of built community assets in urban neighbourhoods and similarly reflects the diversity of the population. While religious purpose is not central in the design, the architectural changes proposed have provided a necessary increased functionality to the space where religious assembly is still possible; providing open space and flexible furniture allows for this configuration if desired. However, it is important to envision futures that are more socially ambitious, which inherently involves architecture in advancing them. The specific skills that architects have in creating imagined futures is important in empowering communities that may not clearly see their aspired communal futures otherwise.

Considering the title of the thesis and design proposal, one may further question the connotations associated with 'palace'; it can be defined as the "official residence of an emperor, king, queen, archbishop, etc."¹⁷⁹ This thesis tries to subvert this connotation in the design project by seeing how South Parkdale's citizens can be considered to such an exalted degree instead. 'Palace' can also mean a "magnificent, stately, or splendid dwelling place."¹⁸⁰ The design proposal evokes BPPC with a renewed monumentality—of both the building and the community—and aims to transform it into a more celebrated place that the community could take more pride in identifying with. The synergetic vision of newly introduced tectonics, spaces, and programs aims to come together into a new whole that is greater than the sum of its parts, which enables a vision of new social monumentality through revitalized social infrastructure. Such a vision is most opportune in South Parkdale, where community is

Fig. 6.2 Parkdale People's Palace will better contribute to the network of social infrastructures and rewire the way that people experience community in South Parkdale. ←

¹⁷⁹ Harper Douglas, "Etymology of palace," Online Etymology Dictionary, accessed September 8, 2023, <https://www.etymonline.com/word/palace>.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid.

expressively vocalized and advocated, and where vulnerable populations would most benefit as they restore or maintain their livelihoods. More of this kind of vision would make for a more wonderful city.

The design explored an engaged preservation of a heritage church towards greater community use in the context of religious decline in Canada. Despite the limitations that heritage designation presents in revitalization projects, a key factor governing their future outcomes involves economic viability. Considering the architectural approach of adaptation taken to bring BPPC into greater capacity for communal usage, it is fair to criticize the financial implications of the design proposal. The design implies potentially expensive methods of construction through the proposed changes to various building layers that may be sensitive due to age. As such, it would be unlikely that the church congregation could pay for the adaptation project on their own. Perhaps funding could come from private philanthropic investors committed on seeing change in their communities. More likely sources of funding are investments from federal, provincial, or municipal governments that support heritage preservation and social infrastructure—all three levels have developed plans to invest greatly in such kinds of initiatives.¹⁸¹ However, it is still important to seek community partnerships so that the large investments can be more easily justified. Finding partners that support the community's initiatives will allow organizations to mutually help each other. Once the project has come underway, funding can be added through space rentals to maintain usage for non-profit organizations.

The thesis argues that investment in heritage can offer new cultural and social assets. The intent of the proposal is to imagine the potential of heritage assets in providing crucial community support to neighbourhood communities and, by extension, to the city. While this thesis is mainly about reconsidering and remodelling the capacity of an existing historic social infrastructure, it also extends to topics of politics, heritage, colonization, religion, affordability, economics, urban development, and so on; these topics are equally important to consider and can be studied further with regard to heritage churches and social infrastructure. Church buildings are especially charged due to their symbolic nature—herein lies their power, which is provided by architecture and which has an inherent capability to transform societies, politics, and history as we continually build over time. It is important for church buildings to adapt to the changing needs of their sociocultural surroundings if their built forms are to be preserved in some way. Building upon their well-established foundations of community through more engaged preservation will ultimately provide for a more sustainable future for the city.

¹⁸¹ Infrastructure Canada, "Investing in Canada — Canada's Long-Term Infrastructure Plan," Infrastructure Canada, April 2018, <https://www.infrastructure.gc.ca/plan/icp-publication-pic-eng.html>.

Fig. 6.3 Looking up at the tower of BPPC from its north facade. →



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