
PARA 2019-20



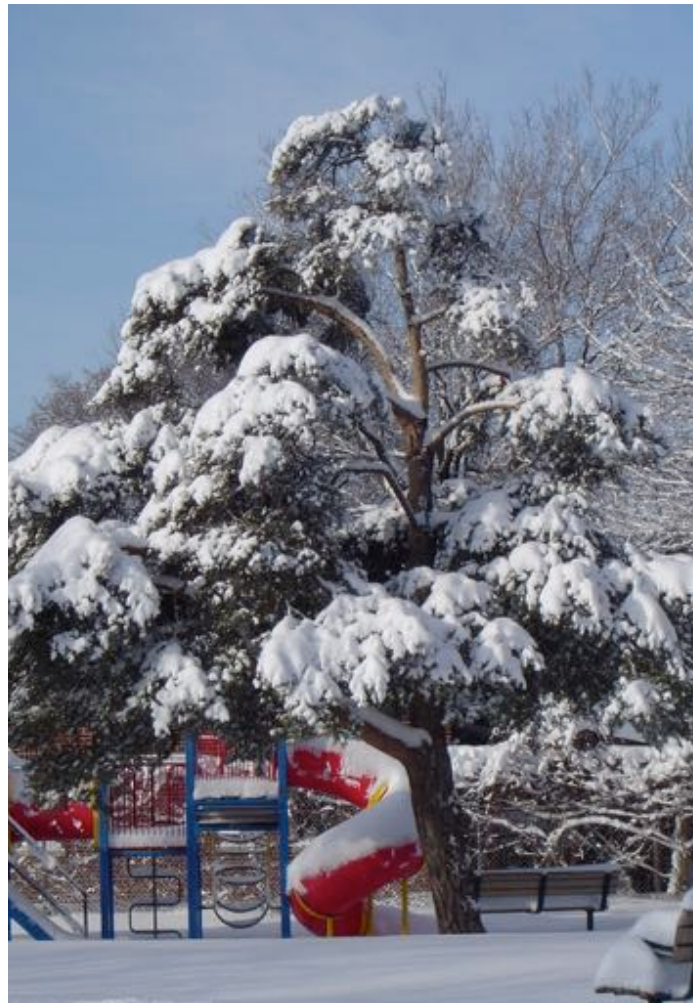
OUR NEIGHBOURHOOD IN A TIME OF CRISIS

It seems an age ago that I was negotiating speakers for our AGM, arrangements that are now irrelevant. All of us have had to adjust our lives and in doing so we reveal what is most important to us. We begin with our own safety, and looking out for our immediate family, friends and neighbours. Many people in our neighbourhood have made an extra effort to help others beyond this circle, keeping them safe and ensuring that no one is left alone. Some of these initiatives have come from individuals or small groups who have volunteered to pick up groceries and medications. Other initiatives (which I will describe later) have come from members of the PARA board. In all cases our renewed communications platforms have taken on a new importance for keeping our residents informed and connected as never

During this time we have experienced many acts of generosity to sustain, connect and look after neighbours.

before.

As I write this on June 1 I have in my mind the images of protest and violence in the USA, provoked by systemic racism and brutality, symptomatic of a grievously divided country. As I revise it on June 8 the images of protest and witness have spread around the world, including our city. We are reminded of how fragile our own society is, how issues of race, income inequality, affordable housing, accessible green space and much more are present here also, if not to the same extent as they are south of the border. 'It can't happen here' is a naive response. We have to be engaged with these larger issues if we want to have a civil, diverse and vibrant city in which we are proud to live. It won't happen on its own. It isn't someone else's responsibility. This is the larger context in which we should view the activities of PARA. We are trying to create and support a community of residents who are connected to one another and committed to a dynamic view of our small bit of Toronto. In this report you will find a summary of PARA's actions and activities in support of our neighbourhood, both prior to and during the current crisis. It's a way of being accountable to you, our members, and to engage you in a few necessary decisions to keep us going for the next year.



Healey Willan Park is heavily used and the site of our popular Party in the Park. PARA is one of the most greenspace deprived neighbourhoods in the City. (Greenspace means the space is publicly accessible.)

A big thank you!

'we have to engage with these larger issues if we want to have a civil and vibrant city'

First, a very sincere thank you to everyone who has given their time through PARA to sustain, connect and improve our neighbourhood over the past year. There are well over 30 people who have served on the PARA board and task groups, or have volunteered at particular events. During this time when we can't gather in person, our communication folk have had significant added responsibilities, and we'd particularly like to thank Ingrid Nasager who (along with others) sends out weekly e-blasts and manages our web site, and Donna McFarlane who manages

our Facebook page.

Kei Yano put her costume making skills to work and offered elegant, fabric face masks to the community on a 'pay what you can' basis. This was so

popular that some other PARA volunteers set up a trial fund raiser for the Daily Bread Food Bank. Next, a group of neighbours offered matching funds for a more extensive campaign, called the Gratitude Project, and by the end of the week we had raised nearly \$10,000. (We challenged our neighbours, Harbord Village Residents' Association, to beat this figure, and they raised \$16,000.) We are thankful for these expressions of generosity that go a long way to building and sustaining community in our city.

Communications

Website [Re]Launch

In 2019 we committed to improving communication with our members. One key component of that strategy was redesigning our website to provide a platform not only for presenting our newsletters, but ample space for news and events, special announcements and community resources. We also wanted to offer you enhanced options for engaging with PARA and its committees, renewing your membership, and participating in our feedback process.

Our website committee (Ingrid Nasager, Paul MacLean, Nick Forsyth and the recently relocated Marisa Burton) worked through various iterations with an outside website designer. Our soft launch in February garnered much attention; little did we realize how valuable it would be as a tool for keeping our community up-to-date on COVID-related matters.

Our website features several photos provided by past board member Katherine Childs, along with pictures from Toronto Archives. Content management and updates are handled by board member and webmaster Ingrid Nasager. We have been regularly posting COVID updates, charitable initiatives and advocacy submissions. With our newsletter suspended for now, expect to see PARA articles released online in 2020, with notification included in our regular eblasts. Now that the news cycle is a bit more manageable, work will resume on our Community History section and photo gallery; to that end, we welcome any historical or event photos that you might like to share (paramembership@gmail.com).

Although a significant portion of our 2019 expenses was devoted to outside expertise for this important project, now that we can manage in-house, the emphasis will be on content and enhanced functionality in 2020. We value member suggestions and contributions; visit palmerstonara.org/contact-us/ .

Eblasts

It can be a challenge to stay on top of the news these days! We've been working hard to provide our members and the community at large with interesting and informative updates on a wide variety of City initiatives, community concerns and neighbourhood endeavours, and have appreciated the many emails expressing your thanks for our updates:

"You guys are great. Thank you for infusing some humour into this situation - in addition to the good information." (B. B.)

Recent events have shown us that access to reliable information is paramount for making good decisions for our families and our community. There is an abundance of information available, and

we strive to keep you abreast of issues that impact the PARA neighbourhood. Our content is member-focused and member-driven. We have also promoted local businesses, such as restaurants, that have suffered during the COVID lockdown. If you have a news item or non-profit community initiative, let us know at paramembership@gmail.com. Eblasts go out to our members and to others who are interested in and register for this service.

Facebook

Our Facebook is primarily used for immediate, time sensitive information and posts that come from residents, outside organizations and the city. It is managed by Donna McFarlane and the content overlaps with PARA eblasts. As the extent of the virus became apparent, visits went up exponentially (as they did to our website), and we were able to reach far more people through this platform than were receiving our eblasts. This helped enormously with our face mask and fund raising initiatives. Donna is stepping down at the end of the month, and we are most grateful for her timely posts during this very active time.

Newsletter

Our fall issue of the PARA Newsletter was distributed throughout the neighbourhood in early January. The newsletter team was working on the spring issue when we had to stop work. We are in the process of rethinking the best way to move forward under the present circumstances. We also have been working on obtaining ads to help support the publication of the newsletter. Community input is most welcome, and we would love to have more people join us.

The Newsletter Committee: Frumie Diamond, editor/chair; Fernanda Pisani, creative director; James Choy; Nick Forsyth; Kei Yano. Special thanks to Tom Churchill for his editing prowess; and Elizabeth Cowling for seeking ads.

Green Plan & Activities

The Green Committee was actively working on a number of issues/projects. We are now on hold, but hope to be starting up again soon.

1. We finally completed the Green Plan (apart from some design tweaks)!! It will be available very soon as a separate document, and on our web site. We will have a public launch when we are again able to do so. We already have several projects underway that support the Plan. Special thanks to Frumie Diamond for writing most of the Plan; Marisa Burton for input, editing and initial layout; Scott MacRitchie for his expertise and input; Vidhya Elango from Mike Layton's office for the final editing and design and layout and the rest of the Green Committee for input and support throughout the process and never doubting that it would get done.
2. In support of the student-led Climate Strike Action March, we organized a neighbourhood contingent to march to Queen's Park together - a very exciting and inspiring event to be a part of, especially going together as a community.
3. Despite our desire to garden, we have to hold off. Last year we announced that we received a grant for \$5,000.00 from the City's PollinateTO to create a pollinator garden at Harbord Collegiate with our partner, the Harbord Collegiate Eco-Club. Over the winter, we were meeting to develop the garden design, plant list and budget. With the school now closed, our timeline for the

implementation of the grant has been postponed and we hope to do our educational outreach and major planting next spring, 2021. The City is providing free trees and shrubs (which we ordered) and may arrive this September. and will need to be planted. Stay tuned. We will definitely need volunteers with gardening enthusiasm.

4. Clean up. We had a fun clean-up at Healey Willan last fall and had planned to do another one this spring. The City beat us to it. (See photo) and then closed the park. Hopefully we'll be able to do a fall clean up.



Green Committee: Frumie Diamond, chair; Becky Armstrong; Scott MacRitchie; Rachel Melzer; Nick Forsyth; Kei Yano. We were sorry to lose Marisa Burton who moved out of the neighbourhood but are lucky to have gained Jimmy Lu.

Lane Naming

We held a well attended and musical event to unveil the new names for our lanes in the southern half of PARA, parading from Clinton School around the neighbourhood, stopping at each lane for a brief description of the person or group immortalized on the sign, until we ended with a concert by members of the Jewish Folk Choir in the lane dedicated to their heritage. Kei Yano provided a party to conclude the occasion, and thanks go to Rob Vipond, Katherine Childs and members of the committee for seeing this project through. Rob donated proceeds from sales of his excellent book, *Making a Global City*, to defray the costs of this event. Rob was to have been one of our two speakers at this year's AGM, so we hope to hear him when we can once again gather in groups of more than five.

Mirvish Village Task Group (MVTG) & Construction Management

There are two aspects of the Mirvish Village site still to be decided upon: the park and public realm, and traffic management. Working with the City Parks department and Westbank's architects the MVTG has offered comment and suggestion on a number of designs for the small park to go on the west side of Markham, just south of Bloor and continuing along the Palmerston laneway behind the houses. There will be a public consultation on the most recent design once gatherings are permitted. Gregory Henriquez, the architect for the development, had agreed to present this design to our AGM, but this of course had to be cancelled. Although the process has not been easy, the MVTG is pleased with the latest version, with a water feature, lots of trees and plants, and seating for small groups.

There are significant issues with traffic management around and into the site still to be addressed. Once the City comes up with a proposal there will be a public consultation.

PARA has very active representation on the Construction Management Committee, a group consisting of representatives from residence associations, BIAs, Councillor Layton's office, and Westbank. The group receives updates on construction activities from Westbank, and deals with complaints and issues emerging from the construction process, particularly as they affect nearby residents with noise and traffic. (These people are putting up with a lot.)

The committee has raised issues regarding impacts to the community including ongoing concerns of early morning noise, dust, site hoarding, and has worked to push for changes to site access, flagging of vehicles entering the site, and street cleaning adjacent to the site. Currently on site, the tunnel under Markham Street is being constructed, which as led to changes in how trucks access the site. Progress is being made in the parking garage levels, with some sections of the building now at ground level. The move of the house at 596 Markham St. to make way for the new green space is now scheduled for July and is planned to be recorded. Special thanks to Roy Sawyer, Ken Balderson, Donna McFarlane, Kenji Ferguson and Kei Yano.

College Street Task Group

The College Street Task Group continues working on its goal of preparing for a community-centred framework for future neighbourhood growth and development. To that end, our activities in 2019 included:

- After considerable delay we met with City Planning at which we sought clarification on using the province's Community Planning Permit System (CPPS) to frame development on College Street West, instead of a traditional Avenue Study, which had been requested by Mike Layton in June 2018. Unfortunately, with the CPPS process before the courts, an Avenue Study would be the de facto mechanism for identifying and prescribing development guidelines. Our meeting with City Planning ended with the news that the College Street Avenue Study would be postponed at least a year, owing to reorganization as driven by the downsizing of city council in the fall of 2018. We have also pressed for a meeting with Heritage staff.
- Meeting with a representative of the Little Italy BIA to discuss their upcoming strategy process and explore any overlapping goals for the revival of the College St commercial area.
- Exploring the cultural history of successive waves of immigrants as we look to define what has made Palmerston-Little Italy a successful neighbourhood.

- Seeking clarification on contentious and precedent-setting residential redevelopments, and the municipal standards involved in ensuring that housing in our community meets all requirements to provide safe and secure apartments and homes.
- Soliciting feedback regarding buildings of particular cultural significant to our diverse community members.
- Preparing for the College Street Avenue Study, tentatively expected to get started in late 2020.

Thanks to task group members Susan Turner, Astra Burka, Allison Kirk-Montgomery, Paul MacLean and Ingrid Nasager (convener).

Committee of Adjustment Project

Helping PARA residents navigate the Committee of Adjustment process

Have you ever received a letter like this one from the City? If the thought of putting together a response fills you with dread, read on! PARA is here to help.



How can I be heard?

Preparing a submission to the Committee of Adjustment takes time and needs to be supported with clear evidence of impact. Yet many people do not have the knowledge or skills to gather and present this information. It's been said that: "It feels like being asked to get on the ice and score a goal against an NHL team, when you don't even know how to skate!"

Helpful guide on its way

PARA's forthcoming guide "*Navigating the Committee of Adjustment Process*" contains valuable tools to help you get your message across to the decision makers. Created with input from our area's residents, the guide outlines how the development application process works and provides practical tips on making a submission to the Committee of Adjustment. We plan to release the guide on our website this summer.

New advocacy role for PARA

Our conversations with residents made it abundantly clear that the Committee of Adjustment process must be improved to give ordinary people a better chance to be heard. We also found out that PARA is not alone in this view – several other residents' associations have the same concerns and are interested in working together for positive change.

We're very pleased to be joining forces with the Confederation of Resident and Ratepayer Associations (CORRA) to work towards making substantive changes to the review process that will help to level the playing field for our residents.

Interested?

We are grateful to the many residents who have helped us with this initiative so far. If you're interested in joining in, we'd love to have you on the team! If you would like to receive a copy of the guide, please send us your contact information. This initiative is being led by Sue Turner and Kerri Salata.

Advocacy

PARA has written, attended meetings and advocated on behalf of the neighbourhood on a number of issues:

- supporting increased bike lanes in PARA and the city
- repair or replacement of Palmerston lights
- renovation of the northern Palmerston gates and surrounding space
- submission on revision of municipal noise bylaw
- complaints to the Province on relaxing various municipal bylaws
- City Charter - without taking a final position, we are supporting this initiative and keeping members informed
- participation in the City's consultation on governance (PARA and other RAs felt that the terms of reference were too narrow to address the significant governance issues).

Membership Update**Engagement**

2019 was a great year for member engagement, and the PARA board enjoyed every opportunity we had to catch up with you! Our AGM attracted an enthusiastic and motivated crowd as we discussed the implications of provincial interference in civic management. Shortly afterwards we enjoyed a record turnout for Party in the Park, surrounded by many PARA members, local business supporters and community friends. The Laneway Naming Parade honouring past residents was well attended, with participants revelling in the stories of the honourees and their influence on the history of our wonderful neighbourhood. Participation in climate action events and Green Committee initiatives generated meaningful interactions. September provided an outreach opportunity at the Bloor Borden Farmers' Market, and fall advocacy work and submissions drew the online attention of

members. Crossing over into the new year, our February website launch brought a welcome boost of member engagement, complete with helpful suggestions and encouraging feedback. The Community Mask Initiative brought out residents in droves, with lineups and on-line orders, and donations of elastic and fabric to busy member makers behind the scenes.

Enhanced Payment Options

Last year PARA introduced an e-transfer option to facilitate membership payments. We currently have 100 paid members, 40% of whom opted to use PayPal to renew their membership in 2019. Our hope is to encourage more members to switch to e-transfers so that we can eliminate the charges PayPal levies per transaction. (A complete list of payment options is available at palmerstonara.org/get-involved/ .)

Did you know that the core funding for PARA comes from annual membership fees? We value our members' insights and suggestions, and both our focus and advocacy work are shaped by the voices of our members.

Membership Drive 2020

Since the launch of our new website and our COVID-related eblasts, non-member eblast subscription requests have increased 30%. To capitalize on this community interest, the PARA board has voted to offer new members an opportunity to join PARA for just \$10. This will apply to new members and lapsed members of 3+ years, and will only be in effect for 2020. We are looking to build a firm membership foundation so that PARA has a strong voice with which to meet future civic challenges. Our neighbourhood has been generous this year, answering the recent call for donations for The Gratitude Project / Daily Bread Food Bank, putting in volunteer hours to neighbourhood pods, and supporting the Community Mask Initiative. Now, in this time of upheaval, uncertainty and financial challenges, we hope our membership drive can further foster community interest and participation.

Financials

See separate financial statement and budget for 2020. A few key points:

- the one time expense for renovating the web site is spread over two years - 2019 & 2020
- PARA was given a generous donation by Marjorie Shu in 2019
- the budget for 2020 does not account for the cancellation of at least one issue of the newsletter (delivered newsletters cost approximately \$1600 per issue, offset partially by advertising)

Board Membership

The PARA board for 2019 - 2020 (nine members) is prepared to continue for the coming year. Jimmy Lu, who has served on the Green Committee, is nominated as a new member of the board. Our constitution allows for 10 members. Marisa Burton relocated to East York, but made a significant contribution to our web redesign and Green Committee. Mary Bredin has joined the board recently. Names with responsibilities over the past year, and prepared to serve for the coming term:

- Paul MacLean, chair
- Elizabeth Cowling, secretary, newsletter ads

- Joan Reynolds, treasurer, Party in the Park
- Ingrid Nasager, web, eblasts, membership
- Nick Forsyth, newsletter, communications
- Mary Bredin
- Kei Yano, newsletter, Green committee
- Kerri Salata, committee of adjustment project
- Frumie Diamond, newsletter, Green committee

Volunteer Opportunities

There are many opportunities for you to be involved with a range of time commitments. Let us know what you are interested in. In particular we are looking for one or two people with some expertise in planning to help assess the Committee of Adjustment and rezoning applications, both commercial and residential, that are made in our neighbourhood. Also, we need someone or better yet, a team, to manage our Facebook page.

Motions to the 2020 AGM

1. That the financial statements for the year 2019 and the budget for 2020 be accepted.
2. That the persons listed above (Board membership) with the addition of Jimmie Lu be elected to serve on the PARA board for the 2020 - 2021 term.
3. That the meeting be adjourned.