

# **Queer Publics: Planning for POPS in Queer Communities**

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**Abstract**

This paper aims to understand the role of Privately owned publicly accessible spaces (POPS) in the context of the historically queer neighbourhood of the Village in Toronto. Maintaining the framework of socially produced spaces, this paper examines the development and redevelopment of the public realm in the Village to determine how queer communities experience space in the city and the role of the built form in facilitating inclusive and safe spaces for queer expression. To do this, I engage with the privatization of urban infrastructure and its role in influencing planning-related institutions and policy. I examine the relationship queer communities have with informal spaces such as bars in comparison to public and publicly accessible space. Importantly, not all queer people experience space in the same ways, and queer inclusive planning accounts for intersectionality and the safety and inclusivity of all users of space.

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## Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the need for more public spaces in cities around the world. Alongside this realization, Toronto continues to see increasing development and redevelopment in its downtown neighborhoods. Public spaces have continued to be redeveloped and created using privately-owned publicly accessible spaces (POPS). One Downtown neighborhood that is increasingly being redeveloped is that of Church and Wellesley (the Village), a historically queer neighborhood. Although this neighborhood is home to a diverse population, because of its status as a 'gaybourhood' experiencing rapid gentrification, it is fundamental to examine the relationship between producers and users of space, and whether these public spaces are both inclusive to queer communities and reflect the diversity of people in the neighborhood. Although planning as a practice has remained relatively neutral on developing space for specific communities, the Village is a location where intentionality, especially in terms of creating spaces for queer communities and using queer inclusive planning practices, can be considered appropriate.

This is especially pertinent when considering that scholarly work frames the Village as experiencing a 'degaying'; yet despite little empirical evidence available to support this claim, Toronto's mainstream news have discussed a declining LGBT residential population (Nash, 2013, 245). As Toronto actively promotes and economically benefits from queer culture, with Toronto Pride being one of the largest festivals in the city and its purposeful maintenance of the image of a queer-friendly city, it is important to examine if this prioritization also pertains to its public realm and planning processes. It is also important to examine whether queer people experience space differently, and if queer-inclusive planning in practice would benefit the community at large.

Maintaining the framework of socially produced spaces, I examine the development and redevelopment of the public realm in the Village to determine how queer communities experience space in the city and the role of the built form in facilitating inclusive and safe spaces for queer expression. To do this, I engage with the role of neoliberalism on the privatization of urban infrastructure and its role in influencing planning-related institutions and policy. I examine the relationship queer communities

have with informal spaces such as bars in comparison to public and publicly accessible space. Importantly, not all queer people experience space in the same ways, and queer inclusive planning accounts for intersectionality and the safety and inclusivity of all users of space. In a time where queer safety is being questioned with recent examples such as the 2016 Pulse Nightclub shooting, Bruce McArthur's unimpeded targeted murders of queer men in Toronto (Day, 2021) and formalized police patrols of cruising spaces, queer inclusive spaces and queer safety are a relevant and important aspect of planning to research.

Privately-owned publicly accessible spaces (POPS) have become a popular complementary solution to address the demand for public space in the wait to build and enhance new and existing publicly owned parkland and spaces. How these publicly accessible spaces adapt to the needs of the community is an increasingly researched area, and my research takes this existing research and applies it to the context of Toronto's largest queer neighbourhood. In a neighbourhood that increasingly *prides* itself on its queer-centric community, featuring visible elements of queerness at the forefront of local businesses and the Church Wellesley Business Improvement District (BIA)'s neighbourhood improvements, one must ask whether POPS are a part of this larger movement of queering space – and whether these aesthetic changes shift public use.

The Village is now filled with visual cues to queerness -- rainbow crosswalks, pride flags in windows and on flag poles. My research determines whether POPS existing in a neighbourhood with so many direct visual indicators of being a queer space follows suit and reflects the community they are entering, or whether the intention of the spaces are to remain blank and malleable. Through the analysis of queer expression in Church-Wellesley, the framework of the social production of space and how these POPS are intended and utilized, my research examines how and if POPS are suitable places for public use, how their design and designated uses impact users, and whether the distinction of public versus publicly accessible is important.

There is not a day that I do not reflect on my own queerness, my visibility to others and the safety that I feel because of that. As a white cis-gay man I face very little threats in public spaces compared to queer people of colour and trans people, so in the

reflection of these spaces it is key to use the vantage point of more vulnerable users of space. For me, these POPS make me feel safe to express my queerness – especially considering I am in a neighbourhood surrounded by other queer people. However, the experiences in these POPS will differ for people with less straight-passing privilege. Even if queer space is created by use, that use is determined by a continuous negotiation with forces beyond us. Although POPS are designated by city ordinances to be publicly accessible, the role they play in social interactions may not differ from any other space. With community spaces forming in private businesses, queer people may find more safety and comfort in spaces that are not formally public. It is key that these spaces are welcoming and allow for social interactions to occur without interruption. If POPS cannot reflect their surrounding community in a neighbourhood with so much cultural history and aesthetic significance, it appears that they are not able to successfully complete this anywhere and raises the question if that will ever be an intentional goal. Queer spaces will live on and POPS have the opportunity to take part in this, but based on the study of POPS in the Village as they stand today – these spaces do not reflect queer space or the historical significance of the neighbourhood and may pose a hazard to the social reproduction of public queer spaces.

### **History of Church-Wellesley and the ‘Gaybourhood’**

Although there are many neighbourhoods in Toronto with a large visibly queer presence in Toronto, the Village is the oldest and most well-known – for its many visual cues to queerness and city and state-led tourism goals. Situated in Downtown Toronto, the neighbourhood has a large concentration of queer bars, social services, cafes, retail shops, as well as sex-oriented spaces like bathhouses. According to the 2016 Canadian census, approximately five percent of Toronto residents over the age of 18 self-identify as members of the 2SLGBTQIA+ community, based on the 2022 total population one can determine this total number to be approximately 151,282 self-identifying queer residents in Toronto (City of Toronto, 2019). The Village is home to the largest number of ‘gay’ identifying couples in Toronto and Canada, and the neighborhood has historically been composed of queer people and businesses (Banfield, 2023). The Village also has a history of prompting discussions on the necessities of a queer

neighbourhood in Toronto. Discussions of the formation of the neighbourhood are filled with contestations. For example, in the 1970's Toronto's queer political leadership opposed further accumulation of queer people moving to the Village, arguing that the queer population of Toronto should instead assimilate into various neighbourhoods in the city to avoid 'ghettoization' (Doan and Winkle, 2015, 23).

### *Aestheticized Queerness in the Village*

In the present day, with its large concentration of queer-owned and operated establishments, the Village is the political and social hub of the Toronto queer community – and the host of Toronto's annual Pride parade attracting 2.6 million spectators annually (Pride Toronto, 2020). Queerness is closely associated with the Village and amplifies its role in the context of the Greater Toronto Area and beyond. Toronto has therefore invested in supporting the status of this neighbourhood for economic benefits, especially through festivals and events hosted in close association with local businesses, large corporate sponsors and a prominent Business Improvement Area (BIA). With investments by the Church-Wellesley BIA to further the aesthetic of queerness in the built-form, as well as the informalized designation of the neighbourhood as a historically queer neighbourhood by the City of Toronto, Church-Wellesley is a tourism hotspot specifically known as a queer-inclusive neighbourhood. In creating an attractive, tourist-friendly neighbourhood, this reputation appears to contribute to rising rents and evictions of long-time residents for short-term tenancy buildings and new high-rises. The outcomes of these actions have led to the further marginalization of long-time residents and their displacement compared to their wealthier neighbours. This is a process that is occurring in queer neighbourhoods across North America, although the Village's appearance of a strong queer aesthetic continues forward, the actual demographic of the neighbourhood can be hypothesized as becoming less queer (Nash, 2013, 245).

As economic and social capital is invested in the neighbourhood, low-income and marginalized members of the community are pushed out (Doan and Doan, 2015, 252). The deconcentrating of queerness has led to more modern queer neighbourhoods forming predominantly in Toronto's west-end or "Queer West" along Queen Street West

into Parkdale, as well as in Leslieville in the city's east-end. This shift in the neighbourhood has led to the closure of popular queer-owned establishments utilized by the greater community over the last few decades, with the closure of the Fly, then Fly 2.0 for a condominium development, Club 120 for a condominium development, and most recently the announcement of the future closure of Crews and Tangos for a condominium development, among other queer businesses closing over the COVID-19 pandemic in the Village.

Toronto itself is a part of a global network of intrinsically connected economies, cultural exchanges, and populations. This does not exclude the queer community, with queer-focused tourism and settlement projects occurring because of the decades of political and cultural evolutions of the rights of the queer community. Yet, marginalization continues to occur in queer populations, especially those who face further discrimination because of additional factors including race, gender, and class – among others. It is important to distinguish the fact that tourism alone is not the culprit in the face of a changing Church-Wellesley Village. Neighbourhoods throughout Toronto, although primarily Downtown and in transit nodes around the city, are seeing intensified developments leading to impacts directly on the built form and demographics of a rapidly changing Church-Wellesley Village.

According to Collins (2004), typical queer neighbourhoods commonly develop in four stages – from their 'accidental' development to their increasing popularity and ultimately the movement of queer people out of the neighbourhood or an increase in non-queer people being attracted to it – leading to the neighbourhood ultimately becoming less queer. By using Collins (2004) approach, the Village can be determined to be in the third stage. This stage exists when there is a higher density and visibility of queer aesthetics and residents, thus the neighbourhood becomes widely recognized as a queer neighbourhood by other residents of the city and becomes a focal point for tourism (Collins, 2004). For the sake of identifying physical and demographic change in the neighbourhood, one must look onto Collins' (2004) final stage. Here there is an influx of heterosexual businesses and customers relocating to the neighbourhood and queer populations are displaced over an undefined amount of time. This process can occur over a long period, but it cannot be ignored that a particular component of the

process of displacing queer people, whether intentionally or otherwise, is the increased attraction of tourists or new residents to the area and the money that comes with it.

In the case of the Village, financial investments in the queer community, or better described as investments in the aesthetic nature of the built form of the Village, has furthered the opportunities for investors to capture capital brought by tourists. In recent history, this is best demonstrated through the choice of Toronto as the host of the 2014 World Pride, progressing the image of Toronto, the Village in particular, as a globally authenticated 'queer mecca'. This major event cemented Toronto as a city that is situated prominently within the network of cities hosting Pride parades as well as organizations like WorldPride who further develop connections between cities with significant, as determined by them, queer communities, queer culture and queer-focused or run events (Armstrong, 2015). WorldPride Toronto was the product of a partnership between Pride Toronto and Tourism WorldPride that brought in 791 million dollars to the city, while the annual Pride festival in Toronto generally contributes approximately 136 million dollars (Armstrong, 2015).

However, providing global queer events has its social benefits as queer people generally seek out queer places and places self-determined as safe for queer people when deciding on travel destinations. This is due to their perceived physical safety and travellers' comfortability in expressing their queerness in physical spaces while also experiencing queer culture and community. Queer people travel to queer neighbourhoods because they are perceived as safe places to visit. There are, however, contestations within this, and Collins (2004) is correct to point out that tourism can assist in the displacement of queer people and businesses in neighbourhoods like the Village. As Harvey (2018, 281) states when discussing Paris, a city shifting to become a center of consumption, tourism, and pleasure changes urban life by absorbing surpluses through consumerism.

Creating a marketable, cleansed version of what the Village is promotes the neighbourhood as a tourist destination for families too, as per the Toronto Tourism website they promote visiting the Village for a "joyous vibe in the LGBTQ+ neighbourhood" (Tourism Toronto, 2023). In addition, Tourism Toronto's (2023, np) website describes the neighbourhood as "a pleasant residential-and-shopping

neighbourhood by day and a hopping entertainment destination at night". The City of Toronto's investment incentives do not align with the concept of a community where queer people can be safe, but rather, prioritizes a cleansed and commodified version of what the Village is – with promotions of hotels, restaurants, corporate sponsors tied to large festivals such as Pride.

Targeting certain demographics, in this case the queer community, to increase financial opportunities for labour markets associated with the tourism industry shifts the built form and aesthetic nature of the Village (Soja, 2018, 103). By making the Village physically look 'queerer' it gives the neighbourhood a role in increasing the value of Toronto's brand. This reinforces the Village as the queer neighbourhood, having been chosen to receive tourist dollars through investment in the aesthetics of the neighbourhood and is given easier access to sponsorships for events. The Village, known to cater primarily to cisgender white gay men, displays how the west perceives what types of queerness is acceptable to display prominently and what type of queerness can be palpable to tourists. In a city where there are queer communities outside the Village, notably 'Queer West' which arguably has more inclusive spaces for the broader queer community, investment in a neighbourhood that brings in money for the city, the Village, is prioritized.

#### *Commodification and its impact on queer spaces*

With increased development occurring in the neighbourhood, POPS have now found their way into the Village through new condominium tower developments. To be discussed further in this paper, new locations for POPS in the Church-Yonge corridor have long been identified by the City of Toronto to be included in future developments to supplement open spaces for its increased population. Although new open spaces are being identified, there are less recommendations for the increased housing pressures faced on low-income people in the neighbourhood. While new publicly accessible spaces are determined to be beneficial by the City, such spaces can only be created in partnership by developers often seeking to develop market-rate condominiums for sale. Further, the Church-Yonge corridor, which contains the Village, is comprised of 70.5% renters in comparison to the rest of Toronto's rental rate of 47.2% (City of Toronto,

2018). There are multiple projects approved in the neighbourhood that will replace current rental housing stock with condominiums, potentially adding publicly accessible spaces at the expense of those who would benefit from it.

As our cities are facing financialized changes to the urban environment, Smith (1996) argues that we are past the point of gentrification. Urban change is described as a “frontier of profitability”, with neighbourhoods becoming centers of investment in culture and wealth creation opportunities that physically alter the urban landscape of a gentrified neighbourhood (186). Smith’s “revanchist city” describes the fear felt by the white middle and ruling class of evolving race, class, and gender dynamics. In the mid-nineties, there was a turbulent housing market, a decimation of social services, increasing minority and immigrant populations, and increasing inclusion of women as powerful urban actors, which was threatening to the ideologies of the white middle class (Smith, 1996, 207). Gentrification and the “revanchist city” are tied to securing urban spaces as places for capital accumulation and circulation. Urban landscapes have long included privatized forms of space that were created with consumption at its center. These spaces were often newly built, and designed to encourage public use, and used as an alternative space for those with fears of the urban environment, especially by the middle-class. These new ‘public’ spaces have been subject to strict regulation of their use and access (Low, 2017, 161). This trend questions the motives of large investments in urban neighbourhoods, and the attempt to secure the power of the white middle and ruling class over those they felt threatened by.

Historically queer neighbourhoods worldwide are situated in or around their respective city-centres, which placed them in the forefront of the impact caused by gentrification and the financialization of housing – and this is particularly pertinent in the case of the Village. The contestations occurring in the Village are significant, with an increase in the aesthetic of queerness visible in the neighbourhood, while simultaneously queer businesses and residents are displaced by the growth of downtown development. These events take place concurrently, and while increased development does not necessarily induce displacement, in a real estate market that prioritizes profits, housing-types for all community members are not prioritized. Soja’s (1983) urban restructuring hypothesis focuses specifically on the organization of

production and labour processes - this hypothesis can be used to examine what is occurring within Church-Wellesley and assist in understanding the restructuring of uses and priorities in the neighbourhood, where labour in the Village is more so tied to tourism instead of serving the needs of residents. In addition to this, labour opportunities in the area are increasingly minimum wage work, with larger chains entering the neighbourhood and the increase of housing that is not built for residents, especially when considering that rents for one-bedroom apartments in the Village have increased 21% from 2022 to 2023 (Zumper, 2023). The development of condominiums has increased in the neighbourhood, especially due to its proximity to downtown and the Wellesley subway station, thus the urban fabric of the neighbourhood is changing alongside the increase in value of both land and housing. The shifting of the neighbourhood to more condominiums does play a part in the closure of queer-owned, operated, and utilized local businesses directly and the ripple effect of these changes is ongoing and increasing. Who are moving into these new condos, and what neighbourhood businesses do they want – especially as it is existing purpose-built rental housing that is proposed to be redeveloped in the neighbourhood? Increased land values also create competition between the City and developers in purchases of land for open spaces, making it more advantageous for the City to partner with development companies to secure these spaces.

The ongoing “assimilation” of queer people can lead to their exclusion from these same queer spaces, as they are priced out of queer neighbourhoods and are less able to contribute to queer space in the same way (Doan, 2015, 4). As queer communities are spatially and socially assimilated, queer neighborhoods are more susceptible to becoming heterosexist spaces, further marginalizing trans people and people of colour. Anecdotally, as demographic information on queer people living in the Village is not clearly defined in census data (potentially a positive in terms of safety), queer people do also rent condos in these developments – one can find condos in the Village advertised for rent on queer-centered housing groups on social media sites. These rents do not necessarily support queer people and can be another layer of the accumulation of wealth at the hands of queer people. One cannot help but fear what is to come, especially when looking at local examples such as the Entertainment District and its

loss of several clubs to make way for condos, with a complete shift in the neighbourhood dynamic occurring as a result. During the public consultation meeting for the Toronto's Night Economy Review, it was evident that a major worry for residents living near nightlife venues is their perception of noise versus sound. As condos move into nightlife areas such as the Village, there is further risk of closures of remaining bars in the area due to the nature of these spaces. Development in Toronto is currently a highly profitable business, and therefore will be maintained by the City's current regime in tandem with its promotion of queer culture in the Village.

In addition to the commodification of housing in Toronto, queer culture in Toronto acts as an export and attracts people to visit the city. Although queer culture in Toronto is venerated in different capacities, there are benefits for the City to actively promote queer culture as a tool to generate tourism interest from queer communities around the world. This can be looked at as the commodification of queer culture, even when considering that City's investments in queer communities act as a benefit for queer people living in the Village, the intent behind the investment must be critically examined – is it to attract visitors or to create improvements in the neighbourhood? If the Village is performing well in this regard, such as in the 'post-pandemic' period, cities will utilize unique aspects to their advantage and capitalize on a niche, in this case - a large and visible queer community. As Toronto is known for having a large queer community, this becomes a part of its approach to attracting tourists.

The impact of promoting queerness as an attraction can lead to a neighbourhood being "transformed into theme parks, where symbols rather than experience create a life-size urban virtual reality" (Castells, 2018, 150). If a neighbourhood's main intention is to serve those visiting it to experience the perception of Toronto queerness, the authenticity and livability of that neighbourhood is altered. The appearance of queer inclusivity is undeniable in the Village, which carries into the role of the Business Improvement Area (BIA). The Village is represented by the Church-Wellesley Village BIA, which states "our neighbourhood has been known for decades as the gathering place for diverse communities and is still a primary point of contact for tourists and LGBTQ people moving to the city" (2024). With commercial interests at its forefront, the BIA attempt to promote and create 'community' through installations, urban design and

events primarily focused on commerce and attracting visitors. Of course, commercial interests are important to keeping a community in the heart of Canada's biggest city 'successful' but nevertheless promotes the commodification of queer culture itself. Through using queerness as a sales pitch, it creates further incentive for the Village's Disneyfication. The Village is filled with rainbow crosswalks and Pride flags, but this alone does not equal queer placemaking. Discussing queer neighbourhoods, Doan and Winkle (2015) state "these initiatives may create or strengthen gay places, they may also create a Disneyfied version of gay space that serves economic development while excluding some LGBTQ people" (22). This is pertinent in Toronto, a city where queerness is seemingly celebrated. As allies and non-queer people take up space in 'gaybourhoods' and queer bars, while spaces throughout the city are further considered 'queer-friendly' there are limited spaces for queer people to truly feel safe expressing their queerness. Yet, these factors are layered and multi-faceted, working in tandem to both bring tourism to Toronto while also acting as a pipeline for queer-identifying people worldwide to find a safe new home through both immigration and through refugee resettlement networks. Well known for being queer-friendly and relative safety, Toronto has become a destination for queer people around the world to visit and resettle.

#### *A Case for the 'Gaybourhood'*

The commodification of housing and queerness in Toronto may have amplified the financial investments in the Village, but these are not the only factor in the gentrification of the neighbourhood. The neighbourhood is situated in Downtown Toronto, with the Toronto subway and Toronto Metropolitan University within walking distance, the Village is a target for development regardless of its social and cultural connections. Prominent advocates of maintaining and cultivating queerness in the neighbourhood, largely Pride Toronto, the 519 and the Church-Wellesley BIA, do not have the power alone to halt development from rapidly changing the neighbourhood – considering they also benefit from it. As mentioned, although the neighbourhood continues to appear queer with rainbow crosswalks and Pride flags, there is danger that queerness is being displaced. Yet, Toronto is considered a safe place to be queer, but this acceptance of queerness in Toronto's cultural identity, in some part, creates opportunities for queer people to move

outside of a perceived haven like the Village and into neighbourhoods across the city. Yes, there are queer enclaves in Toronto's West and East Ends, but nothing can compete with that of the cultural and social connectivity a neighbourhood such as the Village provides. With that, and with prominent queer organizations continuing to be situated within the Village, it becomes naturally attractive to new Canadians who can potentially be visibly queer for the first time.

Attracting queer people to the neighbourhood creates contestations, as outward expression of queerness (and the commodification of queer culture) can attract and create the impression of safety to queer people who come to Toronto as tourists or immigrants seeking safety to express themselves as they wish. Although the continual gentrification of queer areas at the expense of the prioritization of tourism continues to occur, these spaces still act as beacons of hope for many seeking safety and stability while openly expressing their sexuality and gender-identities. Global networks of immigration and refugee services allow for the Village to continue to be a safe place for queer people. As queer newcomers enter Toronto, the Village has queer-focused social services, queer visibility, and community.

Testimonies from newcomers who settled in queer neighbourhoods discuss how their experiences of space differ upon their arrival. For example, once settlement services establish newcomers in their place of settlement, the experience of place and queer visibility allows for genuine connections and experiences to form, with newcomers discussing "how Pride was the first time they had seen so many LGBT people together in public and how liberating this was" (Murray, 2014, 27). These networks create safe places for queer people worldwide to find a home in Canada. Murray (2014) does argue that the celebration and promotion of queer spaces in the west as havens for refugees contributes to homonationalism, using apparent queer safety as justification for war mongering or racism. This promotion of Toronto as a 'queer mecca' for newcomers contrasts with the changes occurring within the Village, with these changes having direct impacts on queer newcomers seeking safety in Toronto while entering a market where they cannot necessarily afford to live in the neighborhoods where they would feel most comfortable.

The Village is seeing rapid change, and although the appearance of the neighbourhood is becoming queerer, it does not necessarily mean that the population is. Although there are cases to be made that queer people are safe throughout Toronto, having a social and political center to organize ensures that safety continues. With new developments occurring in the Village, there is opportunity to ensure these developments and open spaces reflect the community.

### **Privately-owned publicly accessible spaces (POPS) in Toronto**

POPS first made their debut in New York City in 1961 as a new zoning resolution in New York City (Kayden, 2019). The first intention of these spaces was to create new public space in partnership with developers, rather than competing with developers for land. POPS came to Toronto by way of a City Council member motion by Councillor Josh Matlow in November 2012. The motion MM28:13, titled “Privately Owned Public Spaces (POPS): Protecting and increasing access to publicly secured open spaces”, was meant to provide increased publicly accessible spaces in an increasingly densifying Toronto by using the same model as New York City. By negotiating additional publicly accessible open spaces through new developments the City would be able to generate more open spaces while offloading the maintenance of these spaces to the new development. In July of 2014, Toronto City Council adopted the *Draft Urban Design Guidelines for Privately Owned Publicly Accessible Spaces* and standards for development applications that include POPS, formalizing physical standards for the space as well as strategies to ensure these spaces continue to be publicly accessible. This includes notes on lighting, materials and of course, formalized standardized signage that would appear on any city designated POPS space (City of Toronto, 2014).

The first POPS space in Toronto was opened in July of 2014 in the multi-tower development CityPlace. This development transformed an old railyard no longer used by CN Rail into a new highly dense neighbourhood in Downtown Toronto. This new POPS was a pedestrianized walkway and included clearly displayed signage as per the Design Guidelines specific signage requirements.

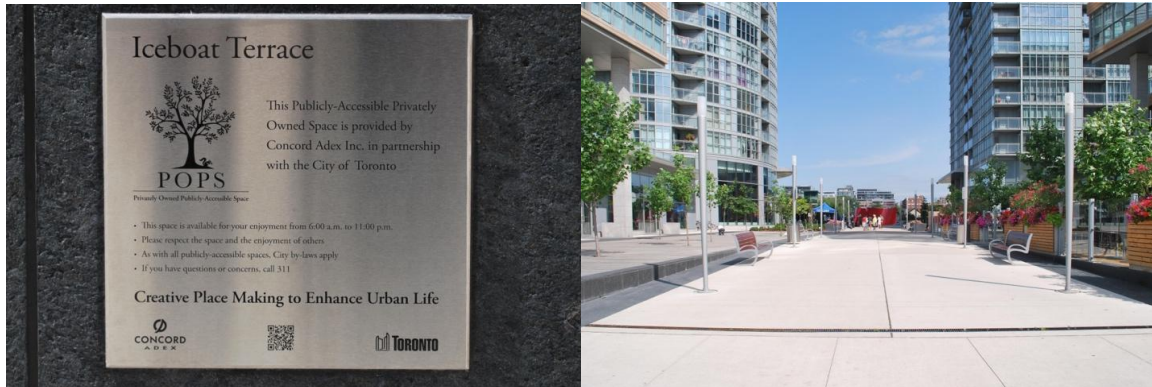


Figure 1: CityPlace POPS

(Source Marcus Mitanis, <https://urbantoronto.ca/news/2014/08/torontos-first-pops-plaque-unveiled-concord-cityplace.10363>)

Both the design and location of a future POPS goes through the development process along with the rest of the project, featuring public consultation and involvement by developers, the City, and local residents. POPS are now included within the City of Toronto Official Plan (2024), with specific qualifications on how POPS should be “prominent, visible, function and accessible” (70). The Official Plan is clear that POPS are not replacements for new public parkland and public open spaces, that rather POPS are utilized to add additional open spaces to neighbourhoods. The City utilizes POPS as a “specific type of open space which the public is invited to use, but remain privately owned and maintained (City of Toronto, 2014). The Official Plan adds the following about POPS:

- a) “generally be publicly accessible and may include temporary commercial uses which animate the POPS;
- b) be designed and programmed for users of a variety of ages and abilities to serve the local population;
- c) be sited in highly visible locations;
- d) be sited and designed to be seamlessly integrated and connected into the broader public realm;
- e) include new trees, seating, public art, landscaping and integration of stormwater capture where appropriate;

- f) include the City's POPS signage identifying the space as being publicly accessible; and
- g) be informed by the City's Urban Design Guidelines for Privately Owned Publicly-Accessible Spaces." (City of Toronto, 2024,3-6).

Many of the first iterations of POPS in Toronto were built using density bonuses from Section 37 of the Planning Act. Section 37 allows density bonuses in exchange for community benefits like parkland, cash, or facilities. The current iteration of the Planning Act allows for municipalities to require a Community Benefits Charge for any development or redevelopment that are at least five storeys in height and that add at least ten residential units. According to Section 37(5) the Act does not stop Community Benefit Charges from "being imposed with respect to land for park or other public recreational purposes" (Province of Ontario, 1990, 79). The Planning Act allows a municipality to require the owner of land, under negotiation between the developer and city, to provide facilities. Facilities have been interpreted to include POPS and therefore can be applied in lieu of Community Benefit charges.

### **Public Space and Public Spaces**

Having introduced the concept of POPS within the Toronto planning structure as spaces that are privately owned and publicly accessible in the realm of law and policies, it is important to define what framework of public space theory is being utilized within the analysis of POPS.

To understand the usage of POPS in a historically queer community the framework of public space as generated through both social and physical aspects are utilized, primarily based on Henri Lefebvre's (1991) notion of socially produced nature and the concept of urbanization as a form of nature. The difference between public space, the physical space often collectively owned by proxy through municipal, provincial, or federal governments, and *public space*, the theoretical space created through the interactions of people within space is an important tool that can be utilized to analyze modern features of cities as social and political ecologies (Stanek et al, 2014, 8). To properly understand the public realm, we can look at the idea of the urban

condition as political ecology – seeing it as a relationship between people, politics, and public space. The creation of urban spaces can be specifically understood as socially produced through the relationship between “material social practices, practices of representing space, and practices of its appropriation in everyday life” (Stanek et al., 2014, 5). These relationships are formed through the politics of encounter, a critical element of the production of urban space.

To do this, users require physical space to have the opportunity to meet (Merrifield, 2011, 474). In law and regulation, urban spaces often have assigned users or restrictions to behaviours ranging from opening time, hostile architecture, and restricted activities. Even with these barriers, social and political movements use public space as places of connectivity and protest, overwhelming the regulations and assigned uses of space. This demonstrates how the physical facet of public space, and the social relations of urban environments are intrinsically connected – regardless of the entrenched ideological design elements (Low, 2017, 156). Urban designers and planners are often in the position of facilitating compromise between the state and neoliberal practices, utilizing citizen participation within the design and objectives of redeveloped or new public spaces, as well as POPS (Stanek et al, 2014, 177). Although citizen participation and local components engrained in the design of spaces are encouraged, these same facets of the design process have the potential to be used to serve the needs and interests of the elites while attaining a stamp of approval from the public. The state also has the ability to shift the character of neighbourhoods in this process, making the physical urban design of space a reflection of neoliberal and capitalist ideology. Yet this same state-led act is also what gives life to political movement and protest in those same spaces through the social production of space.

Literature concerning equity in urban spaces have a specific focus on *public* access to public and publicly accessible spaces, and on the determinants to the access to these spaces. ‘The right to the city’, a term coined by Lefebvre (1968) has evolved as a concept throughout the past decades. Drawing on Lefebvre, Mitchell (2005) sees the right to the city going beyond providing adequate and affordable housing, arguing that the creation of collective urban spaces that respond to the wants and needs of its populations should be a fundamental aspect of urban life. Stanek et al. (2014) go

further, asserting that the concept of the right to the city is vastly different from “liberal claims for diversity of city life, multicultural tolerance, or the concepts of the ‘creative city,’” claiming the right to the city should include active opposition of the “concretization of globally competitive abstract space, struggle against the reduction of urban differences, and protests the enclosures of everyday life” (12).

The right to the city gives power to those living in urban spaces, but Low (2017) discusses a modern breakdown of urban citizenship as a feature of increasing globalization, while Springer (2008) cites the factors that have led to globalization as the cause of decreased social collectivity. Access to space as a fundamental right for urban citizens becomes muddled in the conversation surrounding spaces with less formal designations as public, prompting the critique of who is included in the public. Neoliberalism can facilitate the creation of public space as focal points of the interconnection of socially produced space (Springer, 2011). Public spaces as centers of social life are often connected to the circulation of capital, and gentrified spaces and private shopping malls can showcase this. Urban development channels the flow of capital in spaces that are continually spaces of capital exchange and accumulation, leaving much of the public who may not be able to participate in capital exchange in the same manner out of public space.

Urban citizenship is a term popular in contemporary planning literature relating to the urban experience and social collectivity found in urban spaces. Low (2017) sees a modern breakdown in urban citizenship, citing radical changes in social relations at the local level being caused by interventions such as technology and mobility – assisting in the destruction of “any form of social collectivity” (163). Low (2017) discusses the breakdown of urban citizenship as a feature of increasing globalization. Springer (2008) cites the factors that have led to globalization as the cause of decreased social collectivity specifically in the “urban poor,” discussing how neoliberalism has negatively impacted any “collective egalitarian dreams,” with violence often being an inevitable outcome for survival (550). Urban citizens are being squeezed monetarily, politically, and socially, and community-making and social collectivity are often hindered when desperation and resource-scarcity is pervasive. The role of public space is tied to urban citizenship as it exists as the public sphere in built form, where people’s voices and

presence are recognized and embraced. Public spaces create a politics based on the recognition of the experience of others, thus creating a unique identity of those living in urban environments (Low, 2017).

The way public space, equity and urban design interact are frequently through forms of urban change. Gentrification and the revanchist city are tied to securing urban spaces as places of capital accumulation and circulation. Urban landscapes also include privatized forms of space that were created with capital at its centre. These spaces were often newly built and designed to encourage public use, but as an alternative reaction to fears of the urban environment by the middle class. Suburban social centers have shifted public space to include the private with the emergence of shopping centers. The public sphere is shaped through law and policy, and without legal protections of de-facto (or informal) public space, those who use private spaces as social centers will have restricted rights in these spaces (Low, 2017). Democracy cannot properly exist in these spaces as they are heavily regulated, calling for civility and community – not publicness. The public is merely invited into them, with ideas of publicity being transformed into community, and therefore dissolving the possibilities for creating inclusive but civil public spheres. (Staheli and Mitchell, 2007).

This is also true in designated public spaces, such as national parks and public monuments that have restrictions of activities and uses. With many publicly owned spaces having restrictions, privatized public spaces, including beaches, lakes, and even malls, are subject to strict regulation of their use and access (Low, 2017). Neoliberalism can facilitate the creation of public space as focal points of the interconnection of socially produced space (Springer, 2011). Public spaces as centers of social life are often connected to the circulation of capital, and gentrified spaces and private shopping malls can showcase this. If design can be used to help the flow of capital, it has the potential to assist in creating physically and socially equitable spaces.

Sense of place theory is also important to better understand the blurring of private and public, as it states that physical boundaries do not necessarily indicate how people perceive and interact with space (Klein, 2021). It is less important that POPS are delineated, rather it is better to understand how people perceive POPS in the first place, and how they act in those spaces. If these spaces are not seen as private, or not seen

as public, how does that change their true role in Toronto? Tying together POPS and the social production of space, Crawford (2013) examines everyday urbanism, urging designers and planners to challenge the hierarchy of current design practices, instead grounding design in commonplace. POPS are not designed for the everyday user, and through this research one can determine how POPS guidelines in Toronto can shift to this framework. POPS do, according to Nemeth (2009), attract users to spaces, but at the expense of individuals deemed objectionable or disorderly – leading to designed spaces with strict use regulations, policing and surveillance. Yet, the blurring of private and public continues when examining queer inclusive planning.

The social production of space is important to the framework of my research but without examining its relationship to queer inclusive spaces, the concept of public spaces as places of encounter become complicated. As discussed, public spaces are not neutral by design, with public spaces being shaped by the male gaze and designed for use by, often and historically, straight white cis-gender men (Azzouz and Catterall, 2020). The concept of queering public space identifies the need for an elevation of marginalized voices in public realm design, calling for public spaces that allow marginalized communities to feel comfortable and safe (Azzouz and Catterall, 2020). Inclusivity does not negate the idea that space is socially produced but introduces a method for marginalized people to have more control in the creation of these spaces without domination by homogenous social structures. This is further communicated by Frisch (2002), who states that “planning processes with a strict separation of public and private enforce heterosexist notions of public and private” (263). The delineation of public and private is enforced through policy and design in the Village but academics such as Richard Sennett, cited in Doan and Higgins (2011), argue that inclusive planning requires spaces where those of all communities, not just queer communities, are able to interact in undefined ways – thus allowing for all people to be treated as full citizens.

The framework of the social production of space is intrinsically connected to queer inclusive planning, with the formal distinctions between public and private becoming blurred. Although physical space and regulation is an important feature of public space to determine potential uses within space, public space is created outside of

what is formally public. POPS by definition blur the lines of formal public spaces, and utilizing the framework of the social production of space within POPS we can determine if POPS in the Village are able to be used freely in the same manner space is used in the community by queer people.

### **The Village**

There are many elements that must go into researching the topic of queer spaces in the Village and how producers of space consider the voices of specific communities they are entering. My research seeks to determine if there are intentional inclusions of the queer community and queer inclusive planning in the public realm in the Village, specifically through three POPS in various stages of completion. The neighborhood is being heavily reinvested in by the City and neighbourhood BIA, with parks being redesigned, the streetscape outfitted with 'queer' elements and the first inclusions of POPS being constructed in developments in the neighborhood.

By looking at existing, ongoing, and future POPS in the Village, we can determine through their design, promotional material, development applications and their observed usage what type of impact they may have on this historically queer neighbourhood.

As the Village faces increasing pressures from redevelopment, my research examines whether the City of Toronto and developers entering queer neighbourhoods take into consideration the residents of the neighborhood and character when designing public realm improvements. By investigating three sites in the Village, I assess who is producing public spaces, and who they are producing them for. As physical space is embedded with power, spaces in Toronto are a product of planning as a heterosexist project. As Toronto actively commodifies queer culture for tourism dollars, examining new publicly accessible spaces, and the money being invested in the Village, for their consideration of queer voices and queer expressions of what is safe and accessible will help determine if POPS can meaningfully add to an existing neighbourhood – or assist in its dispersal. Lastly, is it important to determine whether queer communities are specifically considered when designing and planning spaces in the Village – or if there is a focus on accessible and equitable spaces for all.

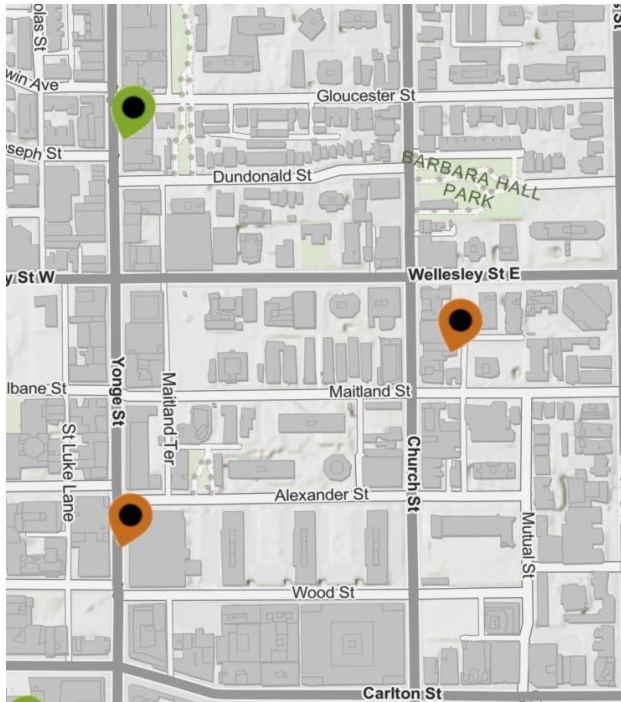


Figure 2: POPS Sites Map

Source City of Toronto, <https://www.toronto.ca/city-government/planning-development/official-plan-guidelines/design-guidelines/private-publicly-accessible-spaces-pops/>

Three sites within the Church-Wellesley neighbourhood were chosen in order to examine POPS in a predominantly queer neighbourhood. These three sites were chosen of varying sizes and completion dates to better understand the roles of POPS and the impact of these spaces on the community they are entering and if the spaces reflect the communities needs and uses. The sites are 81 Wellesley Street (proposed), 479 Yonge Street (proposed) and 587 Yonge Street (completed).

### *City of Toronto's Priorities*

The Village falls under the *North Downtown Yonge Urban Design Guidelines*.

As stated, in 2014 the City of Toronto council endorsed urban design guidelines for POPS due to the increased necessity for public spaces in rapidly growing neighbourhoods, because of this POPS have become an essential element for the city's public realm network. These design guidelines focus on the public realm design of the Yonge-Church corridor, defining their expectations for public realm improvements as well as suggested spaces for new open spaces. The City is prioritizing POPS to supplement public parks in the area, aiming to provide comfortable and safe spaces for pedestrians along the corridor. The guidelines refer to Yonge Street as a cultural and civic corridor, stating that notable events like the annual Pride Parade occur in this neighbourhood. Section 4.5 of the guidelines determines the design for the Church Street corridor, cataloguing the "Main Street" character along Church Street as well as the portion of Wellesley Street. Public realm improvements or additions suggested by

the City in this corridor include on street, or front of retail, patio spaces, and regulations of retail frontage materials as well as commercial unit width. Section 4.8 breaks Yonge Street corridor into sections, determining urban design requirements in this area, with a focus on open spaces and the improvements of a city-owned linear park behind the lots fronting Yonge Street. The City of Toronto (2013) improvements suggest a “[p]rivate landscape zone, widening the pedestrian clearway, street furniture, outdoor cafes and ground mounted lighting. Outdoor amenities such as patios, and exposures to and from heritage properties along Yonge Street” (24) and “[t]he connectivity of open spaces as well as midblock pedestrian movement will be maintained and enhanced within the Character Area. Thus, the linear park is used as a “catalyst for this connectivity” (25).

The *North Downtown Yonge Urban Design Guidelines* report goes further, directly suggesting appropriate sites for POPS and open spaces to be created – including two of the POPS selected for my study. For 587 Yonge Street, this report made direct connections to what they expect to be included with the development of this site. The report states “it is also recommended that the northern edge of the property be associated with a gathering place, contributing to the expansion of the existing open space network. This can be established through creating a forecourt, a generous landscaped area, or a plaza with exemplary design and public art installation” (City of Toronto, 2013, 37). The suggested POPS space at 587 Yonge Street is illustrated below.

Plans also include open space recommendations for 475 Yonge Street, pictured on right. The spaces are remarkably similar to the proposals submitted to the City, and it can be assumed that these spaces were included through City recommendation to increase the odds of an approved development application.



Figure 3: 475 Yonge Street POPS Rendering A

Source City of Toronto, <https://www.toronto.ca/legdocs/mmis/2013/te/bgrd/backgroundfile-61187.pdf>

The report also states the City is “[e]ncouraging new developments to incorporate privately owned public spaces (POPS) and green spaces as a part of their design” (City of Toronto, 2013, 59). Although 81 Wellesley has no POPS recommendation within these reports, based on the public space recommendation in



**Figure 4: 587 Yonge Street POPS Rendering**

Source City of Toronto, Source City of Toronto,  
<https://www.toronto.ca/legdocs/mmis/2013/te/bgrd/backgroundfile-61187.pdf>

the City report an inclusion of a publicly accessible privately owned open space would be seen as a beneficial in its development application, especially considering it also includes retail inclusion and expanded sidewalks as per design guideline recommendations.

Additionally, an important way to view City of Toronto priorities is through the planning report TOCore (City of Toronto, 2018). TOCore is an overall plan for the City of Toronto’s downtown with a relevant Downtown Parks and Public Realm Plan. This report designates POPS as local places that can be utilized to facilitate a wider network of parks and public space in the city. Referring to POPS as “in between” spaces, the plan sees potential development sites as underutilized spaces that can be transformed through their development to include connection points between public spaces and respond to neighbourhood needs to support increased growth in rapidly densifying neighbourhoods. The report states, “POPS are not the answer to the Downtown park deficit, but they can supplement the parks system by providing high quality open spaces in the core” (City of Toronto, 2018, 252). TOCore is relevant in the way that applications are pushed through by development companies to better their chances of getting City approval through variances when including POPS or public space improvements, especially when the sites already have city recommendations to include open spaces within the application. The City lumps POPS in with parkettes, laneways, schoolyards, churchyards, among others, creating a category of space that merges the public and

private to respond to a changing city. Spaces like these, apart from parkettes, act as quasi-public spaces, where those who live in the neighbourhood may use them, but outsiders may be looked at with more scrutiny. It is one part in a larger strategy but will mostly respond to hyper local needs compared to destination parks. Of course, to understand priorities of both the city and province in terms of public realm improvements or additions one must look at the Official Plan and Planning Act, but these will be discussed further within the context of the sites.

### **On the Sites**

#### 81 Wellesley Street, Toronto

The 81 Wellesley Street site (hereafter 81 Wellesley) is a project by developer Aragon Properties LTD, a Canadian company with projects primarily on the west coast of Canada. Of the three sites selected, this is the smallest POPS space at 106 square meters, and features as a forecourt below the 28-storey, 179-unit condominium known by the developer as *Eighty One Wellesley*. Although the condo building is fully operational and occupied in 2024, the POPS is still marked as ‘future’ in the City’s POPS database. The forecourt is seemingly completed with amenities already operational. However, the commercial space is not yet occupied as of September 2024. The site was formerly occupied by Odette House mansion and coach house for many years, which was demolished before heritage status could be given in 2012. The Official Plan amendment to approve this project only makes mention of the POPS at the site once when discussing Policy 3.1.3.2 of the Official Plan referring to public space. The *Public Art Plan* discusses Section 37 of the Planning Act in terms of the POPS and public art dedication, stating that negotiations between the owner and the City determined that the POPS and public art must be a value of minimum \$329,424.00 (City of Toronto, 2015). However, the Section 37 funds were part of a 2015 Ontario Municipal Board case where the tribunal ruled with the developer although the City argued the funds were much lower than other agreements in the area, showcasing some discontent from the City in regard to the public realm improvements set for this site.

Wellspring, a support centre for people with cancer, closed when the building was sold to the developer. The intersection of Church Street and Wellesley Street is 40

metres away from this development. This intersection acts as the heart of the Village with bars and shops such as Pegasus on Church, Glad Day Bookshop, O'Grady's, Steam Works Bathhouse and many more.

#### 587 Yonge Street, Toronto

This site, to be referred to as 587 Yonge, contains a 245 square meter POPS plaza at the base of a 44-storey, 538-unit condominium known as *The Gloucester on Yonge*. This site was developed by Concord Adex Inc and the POPS was open to the public as of 2023. The majority of the POPS fronts Gloucester Street, with large public artwork along the side of the POPS fronting Yonge Street. In a 2014 City staff report, the City required the site to have a POPS containing patio space for retail use and public art as per Section 37 at the time. As previously mentioned, this site was marked as a potential open space recommended by the Downtown Yonge report in 2014. The POPS was approved through By-law No.778-2016(OMB), OMB decision rendered in August 2014 with the order issued May 2016. This was pursuant to Section 37 requiring compliance by Concord Adex Inc.

Fast food chains, payday loans, discount clothing stores and retail spaces, hair salon (over 20 businesses) occupied the site. The site is also across the street from the former site of FLY 2.0, the 519-community hub 280 metres away, Wellesley TTC Subway entrance on site (main TTC stop for the Village). The Pride Parade also takes place on Yonge Street.

#### 475 Yonge Street, Toronto

This site, to be referred to as *475 Yonge* is currently in pre-construction, with the development application having been approved by the City in November of 2023. The site, owned by developer Kingsett Capital, contains a large 1,258 square meter POPS connecting to a future parkland (1,348 square metres) that will be owned and maintained by the City of Toronto assisting in the future connection of a string of linear parks currently existing parallel to Yonge Street from Charles Street to Wellesley Street. According to the Planning Rationale Report submitted to the City by planning consultancy group Bousfields Inc, this development will meet Guideline 2.4 by

“[p]rovid(ing) grade related, publicly accessible open space within the tall building site to complement, connect and extend the existing network of public streets, parks and open space” (Bousfields, 2021, 109). The site will replace a two-tower complex, containing a nine and sixteen-storey hotel joined by a one-storey podium. The site is currently occupied by a Courtyard Marriott, a vacant retail space sits at the foot of the building - formerly a fast-food restaurant. Buddies in Bad Times is located 40 metres away, and there is also the preserved Clocktower from the St Charles Tavern (former iconic gay bar) located 20 metres away.

### Producers of Space: Design and Intended Use

#### 81 Wellesley Street

This site provides a future POPS directly under the overhang of the building, providing lots of shade and privacy. Two benches are provided, they are approximately 7 feet long and 3 feet deep. The water feature, a shallow pool with sculpture displayed in promotional imagery does not exist. Instead, a nighttime observation proved this stagnant water to actually be a resin-like material used to imitate the appearance of water over stones.



Figure 5: 81 Wellesley Street  
POPS Rendering  
Source Aragon Properties,  
<https://aragon.ca/eightyonewellesley/>

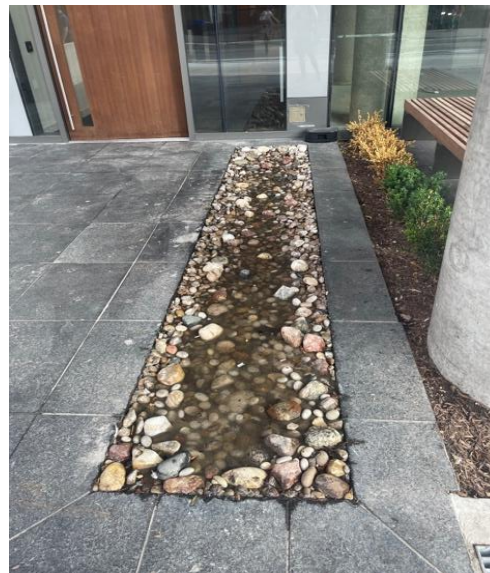


Figure 6: 81 Wellesley Street  
Water Feature  
Source Paul Simoneau

Dying boxwood shrubs lining the POPS provide physical separation between both the walkway to the entrance of the condo building lobby on the eastern side, and the entrance to the parking garage western edge. There are three bike parking spaces located at the site appearing to facilitate use from condo visitors. Public art is present on the eastern edge of the condo entrance but no information about the artist or artwork is provided, it appears to display the American Sign Language sign for 'I love you. It is important to clarify that, as mentioned, the site is marked as 'future' in the city's POPS database, and therefore there is zero POPS signage in the space. It is important to note that as it is not officially a POPS, there is potential for the site's design to shift to accommodate future uses. There is no apparent security on site nor staffed lobby entrance, however the site provides a plethora of signage regarding use of the space. Most notably there is a large 'Private Property: 24 hours in Use' metal sign, and 'Warning Premises Monitored by 24 Hour Surveillance' sign to remind users that the space is being monitored.



Figures 7 and 8: Signage at 81 Wellesley Street  
Source Paul Simoneau

Along with signage of private property, the space, as of September 2024, is designed for physical eyes on the space. Sitting between the condo entrance, the garage entrance, and doors to a retail space, this space is not designed for sitting privately or comfortably as your back is exposed to open space – however the space is incomplete, and these are subject to change. This POPS is considered a forecourt and

has separate regulatory guidelines in recommended urban design guidelines. These are meant to be extensions of the public walkway, should be always accessible, and have pedestrian scale lighting, this site is specifically, “a landscaped open space between the public sidewalk and the main entrance of a building” (City of Toronto, 2014, 33).

From the promotional images Aragon chose for 81 Wellesley for the sales of condominium units in the building one can see a few different uses. At first glance, there appears to be a largely visibly white user base with one Black woman exiting the



Figure 9: 81 Wellesley Street POPS rendering A  
Source Aragon Properties, <https://aragon.ca/eightyonewellesley/>

building to walk a dog. The users imagined by the producers of the space are primarily focused on the retail element of the POPS space. One can see a man in a suit and a group of women at the retail tables, two women with shopping bags walking by and staff inside the imagined café.

In our second image, Aragon promotes the POPS as a more restaurant-like atmosphere with dressed up people enjoying the table service provided by the commercial space.

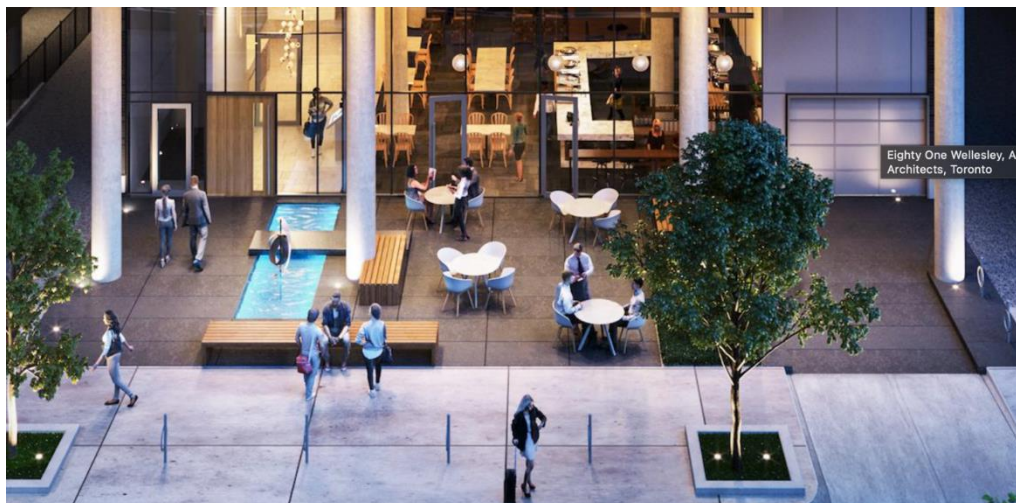


Figure 10: 81 Wellesley Street POPS Rendering B  
Source Aragon Properties, <https://aragon.ca/eightyonewellesley/>

The space also features people talking on benches, entering the condo, and waiting for what appears to be a ride to the airport or train station. One can make the conclusion that the design of this space is obviously reliant on having a commercial space with outdoor dining options in the POPS and that intended use of the space is primarily focused on use by the public solely for commercial uses.

Next, we have images used by Aragon to showcase 81 Wellesley from Church and Wellesley. This image goes as far as removing the queer representation present on surrounding buildings, creating a blank space in which the condominium can adapt the environment its moving into to their needs.



Figure 11: Wellesley Streetscape Rendering

Source Aragon Properties, <https://aragon.ca/eightyonewellesley/>

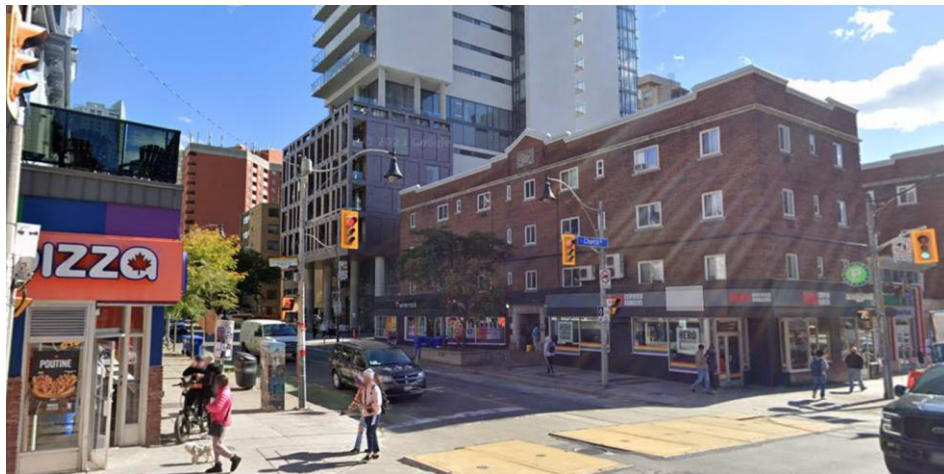


Figure 12: Google Street view of Church Street and Wellesley Street

Source Google Maps, [google.com/maps](https://www.google.com/maps)

In the Village, businesses have converted their typical displays to introduce pride flags or rainbows onto their logos or used for their window displays. Granted, the promotional images were released in 2016 and the push for more queer aesthetics in the neighbourhood have shifted. Rainbow imagery was more limited to signage on light poles as well as the prominent Pizza Pizza at the corner of Church and Wellesley, but in the promotional material they simply deleted the Pizza Pizza from existence – which is a bit odd because applications for development of that site were not submitted to the City’s Application Information Centre until 2024. Aragon also released an entire promotional video which also removes any pride symbolism from the streetscape entirely. This demonstrates how the developer did not utilize the fact that its new development was in the heart of the largest and most historic queer neighbourhood in Canada, not referencing anything about the neighbourhood other than the subway station in any promotional materials found.

### *587 Yonge Street, Toronto*

This POPS site is less visually attached to the condo project that led to its creation on the corner of Yonge and Gloucester Streets. The site currently provides four shade trees, a large sculpture and seven triangular sitting areas made of smoothed out cement. The space is floored with interchanging brick tiles in black and grey patterns. There are no private property signs or cameras visible to its users with prominent POPS signage showcased on the wall of the building.



Figure 13: POPS Signage at 587 Yonge St  
Source Paul Simoneau

There is signage for a soon-to-open Japanese restaurant entrance at the western edge of the POPS but does not take over the entirety of the space. There are no condo balconies or windows looking directly over the space, providing a sense of privacy. There is only one garbage container provided in

the space, what appeared to be bike locks but during a night visit turned into small waist high light poles.

There is a subtle private entrance sign at the entry doors to the condo, however one cannot see it unless walking towards the entrance doors. An unfinished component of 587 Yonge is luxury condos being constructed in two restored Victorian houses directly beside the POPS site, which adds something interesting to look at for POPS users. The eastern edge of the site features a sandwich board advertising underground parking, but the driveway appears separate from the site. The site contains multiple seating areas, trees, bike racks, POPS signage all in accordance with the City of Toronto POPS guidelines as well as a public art piece titled *Cloaked Presence* by Albert Paley.

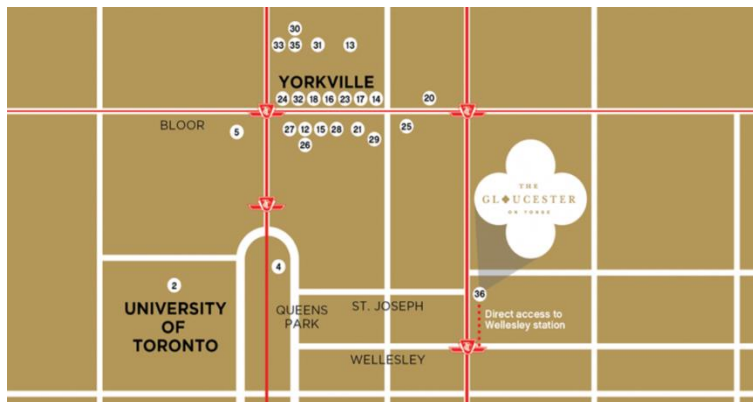


Figure 14: 587 Yonge Street Promotional Map  
Source Concord Adex, <https://thegloucesteronyonge.com/>

The Concord Adex Inc website for *The Gloucester* closely attaches itself as being in close proximity to Yorkville rather than Yonge Street or the Village, choosing to reference nearby attractions, including the direct connection with Wellesley TTC Station, while not mentioning Church Street or queer elements

of the neighbourhood at all. The map below from the condo website chooses to point out all that Yorkville has to offer rather than anything on Church Street or Wellesley Street, located much closer.

The promotional material chooses two different views of the POPS, with both omitting the usage of the space by users in any capacity. Rather showcasing luxury cars entering and exiting the parking laneway and the second image displaying people walking on the sidewalk past the POPS without interacting with it. The absence of people and attachment to Yorkville can provide insight into the intended uses of this space, almost hiding that there will be a publicly accessible plaza in front of the space used by people some residents would rather exclude from the space.



Figure 15: 587 POPS View with Pedestrians  
Source Concord Adex, <https://thegloucesteronyonge.com/>



Figure 16: 587 POPS View with Cars  
Source Concord Adex. <https://thegloucesteronyonge.com/>

### *475 Yonge Street*

475 Yonge Street is a planned POPS to be included with the development of two towers by KingSett Capital, therefore there is no space or amenities to visit. However, based on the material in the development application submitted to the City of Toronto, the planned 1,258 square metre POPS space will be located as a pedestrian thoroughfare between the two planned towers providing a pedestrian connection to a 1,348 square metres public park at the eastern edge of the site. The POPS intention is to connect Yonge Street with the future linear park, facilitating both a public connection to Yonge Street as well as view of the heritage clock tower of a former queer bar, the St Charles Tavern. The POPS was originally proposed to be 125 square metres but was increased in the revised proposal submitted in 2021.

In direct contrast to the 587 Yonge Street site, 475 Yonge Street promotional material showcases a well-used POPS space: several people walking through the space or lounging on the grassed area, or sitting at tables along its edges. People in these renderings vary from those in business attire to trendy outfits and younger users. It appears that KingSett is attempting to showcase the POPS as a fully public amenity, and as discussed in the relevant planning documents, it realizes a plan proposed for an open space pedestrian connection recommended by the City. At this point in the

application process, there is an opportunity to ensure that the POPS can reflect the community it is entering. As mentioned, the heritage Clock Tower preserved in the condo across the street from the development does include queer histories within the amenity spaces due to its location of the historically prominent St Charles Tavern (Petar, 2023). As



Figure 17: 475 Yonge Street POPS Rendering B

Source Kingsett Capital, <https://www.toronto.ca/city-government/planning-development/application-details/?id=4996273&pid=226521&title=475%20YONGE%20ST>

development of this site will take multiple years, it is important to see this as an opportunity to push for the City and developers to entrench their spaces with cultural and historical connections to space. There is hope for some connections to the Village, as there is reference to queer histories of the Clock Tower in the Heritage Preservation Report presented by KingSett.

### **Observations of usage by USERS**

Observation for this project was completed by visiting the sites on three separate occasions at three different times of day. Each visit consisted of a 45-minute-long observation with the intention of observing usage of the POPS. No assumptions were

made about the people visiting unless otherwise made obvious through uniform and how people interacted with other users of the space. Documentation was made for when people arrived, how they interacted with each space and the duration of their stay. The timelines for the visits were based on common meeting times where people would more likely interact with public spaces. Firstly, early weekday afternoon visits around the standard 'lunch break' conducted from 12:30 pm to 2:00 pm. The second time was between 4:15 pm and 5:50 pm on a weekday to determine how the space was used at a common gathering time after the standard completion time of a 9-to-5. Lastly, because the neighbourhood is known for nightlife, a visit was conducted between 9:00 pm and 10:45 pm to determine how people interacted with the sites on a Saturday evening. It took just five minutes to go between the two sites, which allowed me to also see the usage of Barbara Hall Park, a medium sized public park as well as the streetscape.

### 81 Wellesley Street

Observations of the future POPS site were conducted by sitting on a public planter directly to the north of the site with clear views of the POPS. I chose not to utilize the POPS benches to sit and conduct the observation due to the size of the space. Had I chosen to take up one of the benches it could have interfered with the space's use, especially when a good alternative was provided across the street. At the end of each visit, I would enter the POPS space to sit for a few minutes to get a sense of the space.

September 4, 2024 – 1:15pm to 2:00pm:

On arrival at the future POPS, a work van was using POPS as a parking space. Worker came from behind the condo and moved the van at 1:30 pm. Space use evidence included many cigarette butts scattered throughout the forecourt, and beer cans and wrappers on ground. This is where I first noticed the lack of any garbage



Figure 18: Van parked in POPS  
Source Paul Simoneau

containers on the site. There were a few people walking in and out of the condo entrance throughout the time there but not one interacted with the space. Due to the space being unoccupied, I spent the last 10 minutes of observation in the space and was the only user of the benches throughout the entire duration of the observation. The first usage of the space was a person walking their dogs which urinated on the bushes. However, the Church and Wellesley corner has many people standing, eating, or smoking.

August 14, 2024 - 4:15 pm to 5:00 pm: On my arrival there were two different people sitting on each of the two benches. One man left at 4:30 pm when someone came down to meet him from the condo building, with the second user leaving shortly after. Both spent time on their phones while on the benches. Another person arrived at 4:45pm to sit on a bench, they were picked up by an Uber or rideshare at 4:50 pm. The most interesting thing of note on this observation was how the car easily hopped the curb to pick passengers up on the extended sidewalk. At 4:53 pm another person came to sit on a bench and went on their phone. A second person arrived at 4:45 pm – choosing to just sit and look out at the street. Both users remained there as I ended my observation. At this time the streets were full of people walking, with a few people sitting on planters on Wellesley Street.

September 14, 2024 - 9:30 pm to 10:15 pm: At night the space appeared to be shrouded in bright overhead lighting coming from the third-storey canopy covering the site. Unexpectedly there was no lower lighting for users of the space like the POPS guidelines state for forecourts. The POPS was completely empty, with the condo lobby filled with 5 to 10 people standing inside waiting for rides and deliveries. Although the benches were empty, all of the planters on Wellesley Street, along with the front plaza for the rental building across the street had multiple people sitting in them in stark contrast to the brightly lit future POPS. The first user of the space arrived at 9:58 pm when a person on their phone sat on one of the benches. Another group of 4 people with what appeared to be bags of food came at 10:00 pm, they walked into the POPS but turned around choosing to stand and talk on the sidewalk instead. After their

conversation they continued down the street at 10:02 pm, seemingly choosing not to stay in the space. The user on the phone left the space heading back to Wellesley Street, where they had originally come from back towards Church Street. A person looking for empty cans and cigarette butts along the street was slowly checking out curbs and planters along Wellesley Street until arriving at the site at 10:14 pm, where he quickened his pace and quickly looked in the shrubs of the POPS before leaving. As I got up to leave at 10:15 pm yet another car used the extended sidewalk in front of the POPS to park before running to collect food at a commercial space across the street. The streets were full of people, with many groups and single people walking towards and away from Church Street past the site. Music from bars on Church Street were audible from the space, yet throughout the time there it had one user.

#### 587 Yonge Street, Toronto

Observations of the POPS space was conducted within the POPS itself, as the size of the POPS allowed me to be within the space without influencing my surroundings. I sat at one of the concrete sitting areas furthest away from any users of the space that occupied it.

September 4, 2024 - 2:05pm to 2:50pm: On arrival there were four bike couriers sitting in shade, with two more joining them at 2:10 pm. There was also what appeared to be a student, with a university sweater working on a laptop with university stickers on another bench who was picked up by a friend at 2:20 pm. At 2:31 pm two people arrived who stood by the statue shortly before continuing to walk up Yonge Street. Two more couriers arrived at 2:44pm, making the space loud with people making conversation and users on phone calls, while many people were going in and out of condo at this time making the space feel full. Most people tried to sit in the shade provided by the statue or trees in the space, choosing to sit closely to other users rather than the seats with full sun.

August 14, 2024 - 5:05pm to 5:50pm: On arrival there were three people already occupying the site. A person with a baby arrived at 5:07 pm, taking the baby out of the stroller and sitting with them on concrete benches. Two bike couriers arrived at 5:10 pm,

sitting with the other couriers and creating the appearance that this POPS is a meeting place for bike couriers with a number spread out resting in shade of sculpture. Bike couriers were chatting, some were listening to music or talking on phone loudly undisturbed. Dog walkers using space for bathroom area, not disturbing anyone as it is a large enough space. Woman arrives at 5:16 pm, with a man coming to meet her, leaving together at 5:25 pm. Older woman with walker sits in shade, joined by another man who is also looking for a shady spot to rest at 5:15 pm. Couriers using space to fix up their bikes, with some users utilizing the POPS as a short cut to Yonge Street. Pair of people go into sculpture to admire. Later, someone goes into it to light a cigarette with some wind protection. Three men in construction vests arrived on the site at 5:27pm. By 5:30 pm the site was completely full of people resting on the seats, with every sitting area and the inside of the sculpture being occupied by the public. Condo worker with uniform comes out around 5:35 pm but just inspects an area of the POPS floor along the retail frontage. Man and woman with small child come from condo but do a walk around the POPS before heading down street. Space facilitates conversation of users of the space based on the placement of the seating. I witnessed what seemed to be strangers chatting about weather, the sculpture, littering and job availability in the city. As I was leaving, another dog walker arrived to rest on the seat I occupied.

September 14, 2024 - 10:20 pm and 11:05 pm: At night the space appeared to have soft pedestrian friendly lighting. On arrival there were already three different bike couriers settling into the space on two sitting benches. On another bench there was a man, appearing to also be a courier, laying down. All four bikes were parked around them. Another bike courier comes at 10:25 pm to smoke a cigarette on one of the benches. A user arrives at 10:27pm to sit before shortly being met by a person coming from the condo to let them in at 10:29 pm. At 10:28pm someone came to sit and smoke cigarette on bench before going into condo at 10:31 pm. At 10:33 pm two of the original bike couriers have their phones alert them to an order, some discussion had between them and the two others in their groups, and they proceed to chug their water and go on their way. The third of the group leaves shortly after, leaving the laying person in the group. On arrival there was a shopping cart left in the POPS space, a group walking from

Yonge Street with large items use it to carry their things down Gloucester Street. Another bike courier arrives at 10:40 pm to sit, leaves at 10:45 pm. Two people come at 10:42pm to sit and look out at Yonge Street, leaving at 10:46 pm. While here it was also noted that many people going to and from Yonge Street would use POPS as a short cut to walk through. Two more couriers arrive between 10:44pm and 10:45pm, arriving separately but seemed to be meeting. Another arrives at 10:47 pm to meet the two new couriers. Separate courier arrives at 10:49 pm and sits far from others to talk on phone. Two people exit condo building at 10:50 pm and sit on bench together, catch an uber together. Original user of space laying on bench leaves at 10:53 pm. Another Uber arrives and meets the new group at 10:55 pm. A large group of seven people walks loudly down Yonge Street; one falls on street and group props him up to help him onto the seating in the POPS space. They rest their friend and leave 5 minutes later once they have it sorted.

#### 475 Yonge Street

This site is in pre-construction and therefore has no physical space to observe. Visits to the future site did showcase busy sidewalk spaces, queer artwork in the alleys. It can be assumed based on pedestrian traffic that the walkway will be utilized through the POPS.

#### **Reflections of POPS in relation to queer placemaking**

The City of Toronto's intentions of POPS are clearly for pedestrian safety, comfort, and accessibility to open spaces -- yet these intentions do not necessarily reflect the desires of the community and its surroundings. While community consultation is completed for each POPS site in the case study, consultation processes occur for the developments themselves, with no specific POPS related community consultations available or included in the City's application databases. All three sites are located within 360 metres of queer bars, cafes and retail spaces, and directly in or adjacent to the largest queer neighbourhood in Canada, yet these spaces make no reference or intentionality in their projects to the queer community that surrounds it, and that these spaces are entering.

Queer neighbourhoods worldwide have continued to be impacted by the financialization of housing and gentrification, and Toronto is no exception. In discussing queer areas in cities, Orne (2016) argues that “the continued assimilation of the LGBTQ community will lead to further exclusion from LGBTQ spaces” (4). This is pertinent in Toronto, a city where queerness is seemingly celebrated, and used as a tourism tool in the Village. As allies and non-queer people take up space in ‘gaybourhoods’, queer bars, and spaces throughout the city are further considered ‘queer-friendly,’ there will be limited spaces for queer people to fully feel safe expressing queerness. As queer communities are spatially and socially assimilated, queer neighborhoods are more susceptible to becoming heterosexist spaces, further marginalizing trans people and queer people of colour. Queer inclusive planning must balance private-public relationships.

Through the investigation of the intentional usages of the space by developers and the observed usages of the space by the public, we can determine that there is not any intentional or particularly welcoming aspects of POPS that allow the spaces to be used in a similar manner as public space. In each case, there is no specific mention of queerness or the Village, nor do spaces provide anything other than a sitting area for people waiting for work, friends, or rides. This does not mean that these spaces have no hope of becoming something, the spaces in the case study are new and as argued through the *Queering Public Space* report, queer spaces develop over time (Azzouz and Catterall, 2020). Although already in a queer community, it may take time for people to become comfortable using the space especially in communities that must perceive the safety of spaces.

Examining the sites in more direct reflections within the context of queer communities, 81 Wellesley Street’s POPS is still in ‘future’ status as per the City of Toronto’s POPS database, but the site as it stands contains infrastructure to facilitate the social production of space. Although the site stands out as a blank space compared to the surrounding neighbourhood and streetscape, especially in terms of queer aesthetics engrained in the built form, the public are free to become users of space within the site as long as they mind the private property signs. Unencumbered physical access exists, with the ability to sit for long periods of time uninterrupted, but those who

fear repercussions of occupying spaces with the appearance of private property will likely avoid it. Marginalized communities are policed in formal and informal ways, and the risks outweigh the benefits of a bench. Through the observation of the space, the users of this site do include work vehicles, suggesting this space is yet completed and its intended uses remain to be retrofitted. As per promotional material provided through the developer, the intended uses of this space appear complementary to the commercial space inside the building. If this is the case, this space will become less undefined and therefore may create barriers to its use. The social production of space will be articulated by the consumption of products. With the many private property signs currently visible in the POPS, one can hope that these benches will remain usable by the public not actively consuming products. Yet, as discussed, quasi-public spaces for queer people have historically been a main community hub for those seeking spaces to freely be themselves. A prominent example of this is the nearby Second Cup café on Church Street, a mere two-minute walk from the site. This Second Cup café is a meeting space for queer people and walking by one can witness the importance of this space to the community. Primarily, this space is occupied by elder white cis-gay men, but it exists as a popular meeting place.

Meeting spaces like this Second Cup exist throughout the Village, whether bar patios or dance floors, and are actively used as community hubs to connect with new people, as well as friends, neighbours, and love interests.

There is an active movement from public to private when it comes to cities. Suburban city centres in the Greater Toronto Area often feature large malls that act as the community hub for the area, utilizing private spaces for public community building while allowing for the increase of commercialization of spaces to feel like a part of the urban fabric (Low, 2017). Similarly, private spaces are used as public space outside of the queer community, the difference being that in suburban areas, shopping malls are used as public spaces, yet in incomplete ways as these spaces are hyper-patrolled or even at risk of closing.

In a *Now Toronto* article about change in the Village, respondents consider businesses closing as “a huge problem, which makes people feel less safe.” (Banfield, 2023). With fewer options to use the private as public to establish community, there are

more questions about if queering the built form of the neighbourhood is enough to keep an established queer community alive. As historian George Chauncey (1995) argues, there is “no queer space, there are only spaces used by queers or put to queer use” (224).



Figure 19: Church Street Second Cup  
Source Google Maps, [google.com/maps](https://www.google.com/maps)

There is much to say regarding private spaces acting as public space for those facing issues in expressing themselves freely in public, such as queer people expressing their queerness or intimacy, but this use of the private spaces, like bars, as a public space do not necessarily equate solely with consumerism. Private spaces can act as a community destination – curating spaces as a gathering spot and creating a unique identity for the private businesses operating in the Village, not just as businesses and bars, but as publicly accessible community hubs for queer people. This identity as a *public space* exists in all spaces that people use to create *public space* -- but the businesses in the Village act as the safest places in the city for queer people to express queerness without, for the most part, fear of harassment, violence or being ostracized while being able to connect with the larger queer community. Communities need *community space* as well as public space.

Existing public spaces in the Village are well used, but the users of these spaces differ. Barbara Hall Park located between 81 Wellesley and 587 Yonge developments is often filled with people. The users of the spaces include those doing fitness classes, catching up with friends as well as users of the 519, an important queer community centre and social service provider in the neighbourhood. There is also a set of linear parks undergoing expansion above the underground TTC Yonge line, creating a larger interconnected park system. The users of these spaces vary from teenagers to those seeking a safe place to rest or sleep or smoke along the benches. My question is

whether POPS in the Village will take on a different form than the public parks surrounding them. If the POPS in this case study will act more as partial commercial spaces in tandem with businesses, will local public parks support one segment of the population, generally lower income and those who will avoid chances of formal or informal policing in sites, while these POPS act as spaces for the neighbourhoods' new residents, namely those living in new, generally unaffordable, condominium units?

Socially produced space in urban environments requires physical spaces to meet, to play, and to engage socially and politically (Merrifield, 2011). Specific activities being assigned to these physical locations have the ability to create further legitimacy of said spaces, however it is irrespective of who is assigning these specific activities (Mitchell, 2003). Yet, the distinction of whom the assigner of that space is important when examining areas with assigned roles that can undermine the ability to socially produce space. This exemplifies that what creates urban space is the relationship between the social, political, and physical. If physical space nods to the communities they are to serve, it may break down the barrier faced by those who feel like certain spaces are not meant for them.

According to the Toronto Great Streets report by the Metcalf Foundation (2018), placemaking is a key element in making a great street, and therefore great public spaces. A key element of that is neighbourhood character, if a community's identity is an integral aspect of a public space, it becomes a way to foster community and increase local stewardship of its spaces. Without inclusion of unique cultural and historical elements in these spaces one creates a sterile space that does not foster citizen interaction in the same capacity. POPS are a part of this public realm study, and therefore can be seen to better these spaces and make them more inclusive – even if these are at the whim of the private owners of these spaces.

POPS in many cases, particularly with 587 Yonge Street, are well used and meet the City of Toronto guidelines yet fail to pay homage to the historical and contemporary queer communities of the area. Across the street from the site was a prominent queer club that existed for over 20 years and pride flags and other representations of queer life are abundant along Gloucester Street. The statue chosen for the site is an US artist when the opportunity could have been used to give space to queer artists to represent

what life in the neighbourhood means to them. So, although the space is well-used, it does not reflect the streetscape of Gloucester Street which it fronts. The social production of space is evident here, with users of the space doing activities somewhat outside that of the circulation of capital -- although couriers being the primary users both in the afternoon and after-work time periods. This space does define itself outside of the retail space that will take up half the building's frontage in the site, but as in the planning documents used in the development application, the sites intended uses include that of consuming products from this space with sitting area, not yet designated for the commercial space. Of course, spaces where gig-economy workers can rest is important and valuable – but in relation to the spaces reflecting the community there are still arguments to be made that the space can reflect the community without taking space away from those who seek space to rest.

Through the observations it was apparent that the site at 587 Yonge had much more active usage for longer periods of time. One can look at different ways of determining this, but notable differences were the presence of signage welcoming people to the space rather than providing reminders that they were on private property, as in 81 Wellesley. As observed, the street and the space in front of the rental building across the street at 80 Wellesley Street East, slightly smaller than the future POPS at 81 Wellesley, were well occupied and busy with many people sitting on the ground or on planters on Wellesley Street rather than the benches provided at 81 Wellesley. Signage stating private property, and with references to the space's surveillance may have something to do with this. Public spaces operate as an essential element of political and social life, and although these spaces are socially produced, the urban design of these spaces are a crucial component (Van Deusen, 2002). The built form can act to perpetuate capitalist social relations by creating exclusionary spaces, especially in economic renewal projects using beautification methods to attract economic activity to the city at the expense of marginalized residents (Van Deusen, 2002). Physical spaces are engrained with ideology and not considering this can “perpetuate the illusion” that public space can be designed without partiality and debate (Lefebvre, 2003, 157).

POPS, as seen through observations of three sites, could be seen as neutral spaces by users. Although there was no formal security presence outside of some

close-circuit cameras, these spaces did socially produce public space with people connecting in these spaces, talking, and freely using these spaces as meeting places at the two sites currently publicly accessible with solely seating in the spaces. One could interact in these spaces as one does within formal public spaces, adhering to social norms as usual through elements of self-regulating. Yet, as Azzouz and Catterall (2020) state, no public space can be neutral *by design* (12). The queer social production of space can occur in spaces that are not necessarily *queered*, homogenous social structures are inherently a part of public space design, and POPS.

Users seeing spaces as neutral is determined by who that user is. The formal separation of public and private through private property signs, even POPS signage, remind users that they are in private space without necessarily requiring marginalized communities to self-regulate. Spaces like sidewalks, public parks, and POPS are a product of heterosexist planning notions and are used by marginalized people the same way – in the case of selected sites. Not all POPS are as informal in design, once retail locations open within these POPS, this can change. As Azzouz and Catterall (2020) remind us, “[p]ublic bodies and private businesses own, oversee, license or control access to or activities in public space” (13). What is acceptable in a space is decided by both the producers and users of said spaces. Formalized security, whether public or private, can attempt to remove people from spaces based on behaviours, uses, or even perceived uses in their spaces. Control over these spaces occur in different ways, from formalized security to control via social codes of conduct (and these are not mutually exclusive). Individuals who share spaces could regulate the space based on their own sense of ownership of the space, and this can result in people who perceive themselves as having more social power over another to determine what these regulations should be. This could include an unhoused person being ridiculed or a local homeowner calling the police, or even a heterosexual male policing the physical expression of queerness by a person walking by them, calling them slurs or resorting to physical violence because of their perceived ownership of the space and their designated rules of the space.

Physically, these spaces are forms of gentrification, removing spaces used by the community to construct condos unaffordable to most in the neighbourhood and

utilizing privately-owned land in replacement of public parkland. Commodification of housing has led to the high proportion of luxury suites being sold in these developments. Yet, with the limited presence of any queer-related aesthetics in design, or mention of queer-ness in any capacity throughout promotional material, it does not directly appear that queer culture or people are directly being considered in the creation of these POPS. Yet, the focal point that commercial spaces play within these POPS can indicate that said POPS may enhance the financial viability of prospective businesses that occupy them, while also being shared with public users. As is the case with private businesses being used as public space for queer users, these will nonetheless be used to generate income for the businesses that occupy it. There is nothing inherently wrong with creating more attractive commercial spaces using POPS as a focal point for their success, but it does indicate that these spaces are less about creating community spaces rather than spaces for use in tandem with consumption of commercial products. Nash (2006) frames the Village “not as a battleground over the right to inhabit and create space as specifically non-heterosexual, but rather as ‘a location deeply scarred by myriad battles fought over the social, political and cultural meanings attributed to the existence of individuals interested in same-sex relationships’” (2). If time is key to creating queer spaces, POPS may be too new to establish themselves in communities without time to decide how people use that space. Having queer people in spaces does not necessarily define that spaces’ queerness, it is the social negotiations in those spaces that make them queer or not.

Expanding on social norms and practices in spaces, the study of everyday life was extensively discussed by Lefebvre (1991), who states that everyday life is the “screen on which society projects its light and its shadow, its hollows and its planes, its power and its weakness” (18). How we exist in spaces outside the privacy of our own homes or spaces is a constant social negotiation between ourselves and those around us. This interaction often includes that of the fear of police or security – but that interaction is determined by our social location. As stated by Gilliard and Golumbia (2021), “[p]eople who feel socially disempowered are often sensitive to (or at least aware of) the presence of imposed surveillance, whereas those who align with power either ignore or welcome it as a luxury” (para. 12). Passive surveillance is seen as a

benefit for marginalized people's perceived safety in space. This is directly referring to eyes on the street, being surrounded by people who will see them or potentially help them if they fear for their safety. Active security by way of cameras or security guards on site do increase the perceived safety of a space if a user sees security as something needed for their own safety, but if you are often perceived or discriminated as a threat or nuisance to security, your experience of the space is potentially of one who is removed from the space.

Lefebvre (1972) further breaks his concept of *the everyday life* up in two parts “the quotidian, the timeless, humble, repetitive natural rhythms of life; and the modern, the always new and constantly changing habits that are shaped by technology and worldliness” (25). Reflecting on time and the introduction of the arrangement of formal privately owned publicly accessible spaces – and their differences with privately owned publicly accessible spaces like a café or bar – both the quotidian and modern exist in said spaces. Walking a dog, meeting with a friend, grabbing a drink of water are all everyday activities occurring in the social sphere. In the vein of queerness, meeting a potential partner you met online, using your phone to locate queer spaces or people, and others can also take place in this space.

If queer space is created by queer people taking up and using space, therefore within this argument it is relevant to label all POPS, both created, in progress and in development, as queer spaces, because when queer people are in these spaces, they theoretically become queer spaces. However, as public space is about social negotiations, these spaces cannot be *queered* merely by the presence of queer people – although it is a factor. The reality of queer people using the space is that queer people will use that space differently. None of the sites in observation or in promotional materials showcase queer people being queer, unlike the patios and streetscape of nearby Church Street. As discussed throughout this paper, private and public spaces alike have requirements to make them adaptable to ‘queer use’. Queer use would be spaces that self-expression and safety are key, and where there is enough privacy to demonstrate queer behaviours without fear. One could argue it takes a village to create queer space, when surrounded by queer people it is easy to express oneself more

authentically, but just being around the corner or down the street from these spaces does not necessitate queer expression to occur.

In the *Queering Public Space* report, Azzouz and Catterall (2020) discuss the necessity for public space to exhibit more privacy to increase comfortability. This point specifies how queer people often self-police their own behaviours to avoid potential aggressions from particularly heterosexual males. The report points out that these self-policing behaviours are often directly connected to both situational and locational factors. As stated in Azzouz and Catterall (2020), LGBT respondents to ARUP research determined the need for 'cozy corners' in contrast to traditional benches allowing for gazing into the public, to entrench the feelings of accessibility, safety and inclusivity of said spaces. They write: "[d]iversity and inclusion need to be signalled at the intersection of private and public space in order to desist neighbourhood hate crimes and incidents directed against those who are felt not to conform" (Azzouz and Catterall, 2020, 16). Queer respondents also looked for space that has potential to organically transform over time to meet the needs of its users, focusing on less constraints or intended uses of said spaces.

In many ways, the selected POPS case studies showcase many of these conditions. 81 Wellesley does have benches that are long and wide as well as face each other rather than the streetscape. Using the ARUP report as an analytical tool for what spaces can be considered 'queered', the space does lack safety features. The benches direct the users of the space to have their backs to open space, where people are not able to be given the privacy that necessitates the freedom to openly express queerness. Safety is also determined by passive surveillance, which once the retail space opens it will feature, but does also feature active security, removing the element of freedom to express without fear of potential harm from private security. 587 Yonge Street does have privacy provided by the large public artwork, along with seating that allows multiple people to sit together in a small area. It is on a side street which gives privacy while nearby Yonge Street provides passive surveillance. Neither spaces include any reference to the queer past of both spaces, nor has artwork by queer artists or artwork reflecting queer culture or history. Although the surrounding neighbourhood features many references to the neighbourhood as a historically queer space, the lack

of any references in these POPS do mark a potential hazard to the future of the Village's queer history.

As mentioned before, the neighbourhood faces increasing development pressures. Over ten different projects have been approved in the neighbourhood, often replacing purpose built rental units – some providing affordable housing options in the neighbourhood. None of these spaces have any POPS as part of their development. This means that thousands of new units are entering the neighbourhood without any form of public space development outside of the prior planned extension of the linear park provided by 475 Yonge Street. These development projects do not actively exclude queer people, but displacement is likely to occur and therefore will inevitably alter neighbourhood composition. Yes, there are many queer people with wealth able to afford market rate housing whether rental or condominiums, but wealth distribution in the queer community is not evenly dispersed. White, cis-gay men, being the wealthier group among queer people, may be more likely to afford new condo units, but trans people and queer people of colour may be less able. According to the Social Research and Demonstration Corporation report (cited in Appiah et al., 2021), in Canada gay men earn an average of five thousand less than heterosexual men, while lesbian women make ten thousand less, and bi-sexual men and women make between twenty-five to thirty-thousand dollars less. A major limitation to this study is the inability to gather data on minority communities, but based on survey results we do know that over 70% of transgender respondents to the Labour Market Information Council survey in 2023 reported making less than fifty thousand dollars, with 40% residing in low-income households (in Spiteri, 2024). These figures raise the question of whether the Village as it is known today will survive, and whether development pressures and POPS are adding to this change.

Lastly, we can also determine how queer people are interacting with public and private space through *Queering the Map* (LaRochelle, 2017). This crowd-sourced project allows anonymous users to pinpoint on a map a queer experience or moment they had in that physical space. This is helpful in determining uses of space in the Village and in the three selected sites.

## 81 Wellesley

“Stuck out to the city with my best friend and attended Pride for the first time in 2011!” (corner of Church and Wellesley)

“A boy broke my heart here while I was sitting in the Pizza Pizza. I bawled on the curb until my friends threw me into a cab and took me home” (corner of Church and Wellesley)

“Fell in love for the first time, had my heart broken for the first time” (across street)

## 587 Yonge

“I sat here my first pride. I've never felt such a strong sense of community before” (Yonge and Dundonald)

“1980: I lost my virginity to a beautiful Asian man at Club Isabella” (Yonge and Isabella)

## 475 Yonge Street

“Came here with my mum and some friends. I think it was the first time I really saw her comfortable with me being gay. She loves drag queens now” (Yonge and Alexander).

“First Pride that also happened to be World Pride TO. Spent it with my best friend. The first time I saw all those faces all so full of love and queerness. Also the first time I saw all those young faces remove their pride gear and put on their masks again on our commute home, us included” (Yonge and Wood).

This project showcases how queer people create queer spaces wherever they are, however, temporary they are. Reflecting on these experiences of space within the confines of what exists physically while sharing experiences of space further solidifies how queer space can be created through the mere presence of queer people in space. Through the experiences listed by anonymous users, one can see that the public private divide is not discussed, there are similar stories in both formal public space and in private spaces that are publicly accessible.

This project can help determine how queer people are utilizing space in the neighbourhood. There are no distinctions between the public and private in use of space, although private spaces may be the location or mentioned as indicators of where the experiences occur, the actions taking place are forms of socially producing space. As discussed, the freedom of expressing queerness is determined by the space one occupies, but these experiences also mark important events occurring where they are. During Pride there is more freedom to express queerness as the event is fully focused on celebrating that aspect of culture in the city. Freedom of expressing yourself anywhere around the neighbourhood during Pride is more socially accepted as the event is meant for queer people. Other events are nights out, where the Village becomes an attractant to queer people and allies for queer-focused nightlife. As the population of the neighbourhood expands, streets become filled with queer people and the safety of expressing queerness increases. Queering public space also includes the expression or ability to express queerness in place without fear of being harmed. The POPS being in these neighbourhoods mean they will become queer spaces when utilized. For example, during Pride when the parade goes down Yonge Street these open spaces will become queer spaces where people can watch the parade and express themselves with less fear of harm, in contrast to other times of the year when the street is freer from queer indicators. POPS can be queer spaces, but they must fight with neoliberal forces and capitalist values.

## **Conclusion**

The queer imagination can offer an alternative to how we currently plan for and design public and publicly accessible spaces. Queer planning practices showcase a need for community gathering spaces, where one can feel free to express their queerness in whatever ways they choose. This refusal to normalize, pushing back on mainstream standards of expression, can bleed into how we see space. By defying the status quo, there is room to reimagine how we see space, and how we use it. As a queer person living in Toronto my experience with space does blend private and public. Spaces, whether public, private, or something in between, have unwritten rules that I adhere to without conscious thought. I can talk to my community or neighbours on the public

sidewalk, or in the local café, socially producing space in both places. Yet even though public space is created anywhere social interactions take place – POPS, as demonstrated through the three chosen sites, do not reflect their surroundings. In their current form they are the status quo, a blank canvas that can be replicated in any neighbourhood they enter. As queer people we can push back against this and refuse to normalize the use of POPS to replace public space in our cities. There are no one size fits all for public spaces, and as Toronto chooses to expand its POPS program it is recommended that design guidelines be informed by communities they enter and to allow for more citizen involvement in their planning and implementation.

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