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participation

Community-Campus Connections: Exploring  
Collaborative Planning Processes between York  
University and its Neighbours

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# OVERVIEW

**Community engagement has been a core element of York University's mandate for several years. However, does a conceptual gap prevent university-community engagement from being actualized?**

The purpose of this project is to embark on an iterative exercise that brings the Jane-Finch community's engagement concerns directly to the University administration, thus advancing the understanding of challenges and opportunities that exist with respect to community-university partnerships at York University. By focusing on the implications of upcoming development projects on the Keele campus, this project investigates the scope of community engagement concerning land use planning for the Jane-Finch neighbourhood adjacent to York University. Despite measures taken to create a dialogue between the University and the Jane-Finch community – initiated on both the University and community fronts – this project revisits the discussion as a review and re-evaluation to spot opportunities for improvement and progress.

With the Toronto-York Spadina Subway Extension nearing completion, alongside York's renewed commitment to community engagement, it is now more important than ever to review the University's community engagement approach. As York University enters a new era with large-scale land-use development occurring on the Keele campus, the current condition of community-university engagement must be evaluated to identify challenges and opportunities for improvement.

It is important to stress that the findings from this project are not reflective of all members of the Jane-Finch community, nor are the findings from York University actors representative of the institution as a whole. The representatives consulted for this process were requested to speak for their larger entities as much as possible, but the views shared through the research process remain those of individuals. A goal of this project is that it, while small-scale, acts as a catalyst for a future exercise that is wider in scope and can therefore capture broader perspectives within both the University and the Jane-Finch community.

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thank you to all of the participants who agreed to contribute their thoughts to this report. Your views and opinions are the essence of this study, and I hope that I presented them as well as possible. I hope you find this report useful in some capacity for action in the future on community-university engagement.

# INTRODUCTION

This project carries out a consultation exercise to understand the most current condition of community engagement between York University and its neighbouring community of Jane-Finch. While research on Jane-Finch has been conducted extensively in the past, this project tries to distinguish itself in several ways. Firstly, it aims to assess the complexities of not the community itself, but the relationship that the community has with a large neighbouring post-secondary institution - York University. This research is interested in delving into the constraints associated with this relationship. A second distinguishing factor is that rather than distilling the findings with a heavy level of secondary sources, this project aims to place the participants' perspectives, as people who are directly involved in negotiating this relationship, at the forefront.

Some of the key questions addressed in the findings are:

- What are some York University related development projects and proposals that may contribute (or have contributed) to issues with Jane-Finch community-university engagement? (TTC Subway extension, Pan Am, Lands for Learning/edge precinct development)
- What are current York University community engagement practices in place for Jane-Finch? What has been most useful and where are the gaps?
- What are the key barriers to engaging local communities with ongoing land use planning decisions at York University?
- How can the relationship between York University and the Jane-Finch community be mutually beneficial?
- What are some recommendations for how York and the Jane-Finch community can proceed toward a good model for community engagement in planning?

# RESEARCH APPROACH

## PHASE ONE: Where are we now?

The purpose of this phase was to gain foundational knowledge and to gain a preliminary assessment of the overarching attitudes and progress that has been made in relation to community engagement. After closely reviewing everything pertaining to this topic, I identified common themes or issues and used this to formulate and frame Phase 2.

## PHASE TWO: Learning from the community

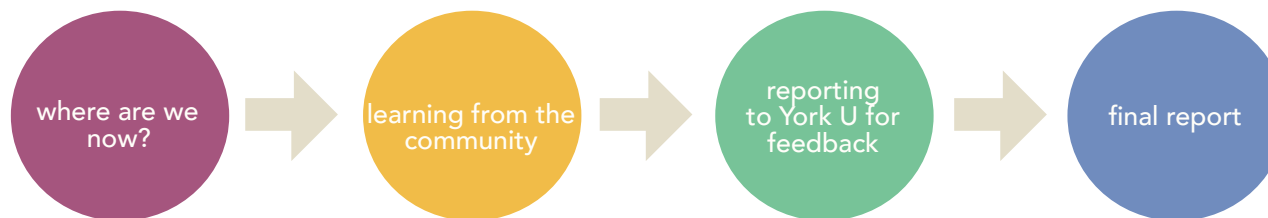
With preliminary contextual knowledge to guide my work, I then approached the Jane-Finch community to identify, from the perspective of community representatives, the challenges and opportunities with respect to community-university partnerships and collaboration. This phase was primarily executed by conducting one-on-one interviews of community representatives, along with a focus group of multiple representatives. During these interviews, I notified the participants about the research that I had been exposed to in Phase 1 and further validated the relevance and accuracy of this material through conversation with those that could speak to it firsthand.

## PHASE THREE: Reporting to York U for feedback

This phase involved informing select York University administration about some of the challenges and opportunities that the community had identified during the interview process for Phase 2. Rather than get affirmation on well-known issues/barriers, I strived to ask the York representatives to comment on some of the suggestions made by the Jane-Finch community, and speak to the feasibility of some of the solutions identified. This phase was an opportunity to critically analyze and encourage the University to push the envelope by directly responding and suggesting practical ways that progress could be made.

## PHASE FOUR: Final report

The final phase relates to reflecting on the initial three phases, specifically reflecting on the Jane-Finch community's challenges and expectations with respect to community-university engagement and what the University's limitations and propositions are in response. The final phase includes a presentation of findings primarily in the form of direct quotes. This phase also presents the research in the form of an easy-to-read document with a summary of the project's findings for both parties - the community and the University - to consult and learn from.



# COMMUNITY PERSPECTIVES

This section highlights the Jane-Finch participants' critical perspectives on York University with respect to community engagement.

The relationship between the University and the Jane-Finch community has historically been one of ambivalence. While the conversations revealed that the University has made considerable progress over the years to strengthen its connection to the community, it is also evident from the interviews that this relationship could be further improved.

### **The Participants**

The participants approached for this phase are socially progressive leaders in the Jane-Finch community. Either on a full-time or part-time basis, they are involved in organizations that strive to address socioeconomic issues such as systemic inequality, (in)access to education, urban poverty, and lack of opportunities for youth. Many of the participants also reside in the community. While it would have undoubtedly been useful to include the input of more residents - perhaps those who do not operate as community workers - this is beyond the scope of the study, especially given the contentious tone of the relationship with York University. Participants were, however, asked to best consider the residents' views when sharing their insight.

What resulted was a rich combination of perspectives that may be reviewed in full by any reader of this report (see Appendix A). However, this section discusses the most prevalent topics related to the engagement process between the Jane-Finch community and York University.

# “IT’S ABOUT WHO YOU KNOW”: COMMUNITY RELATIONSHIP BUILDING WITH CURRENT ENGAGEMENT METHODS

Community members expressed frustration over the fact that from a community worker’s perspective, partnership-building efforts with the University can be difficult. Forming strong relationships with contacts at the University may take years, with community workers often leading these efforts. While some faculty members maintain long-term relationships with Jane-Finch community partners, participants cited some instances where a key faculty member shifted roles or departed from the University, leaving that partnership to crumble with no accountability involved.

Some primary examples to articulate these challenges include:

*“I think when you have an organization as large as a university, you’re going to have a lot of bureaucracy and practices and procedures that are based on liability, legality, rules, and things that aren’t done with the surrounding community in mind.” [INTERVIEW 0007]*

*“I have this longer relationship with York, but I even went to the CEC this week asking if they had a connection to the Faculty of Education, because I really need to build that connection for one of our projects. I know roughly what faculty to go to, but I’m going in blindly, and I have to go to the website, figure out their interests, contact [faculty members] individually and make the case for why I think they should get involved. That’s a lot of work on the part of a community worker. I think most of the University is there, being open to partnerships like ‘Hey, I’m here, I’m really interested in the community any time you need me’, but that doesn’t really happen. People aren’t really there with open arms. There’s a bureaucracy front that you get hit by.” [INTERVIEW 0005]*

*“I think that’s something that a lot of community workers and residents feel – that kind of wave where you’re working closely with York, it’s very hands-on and then suddenly, things end, and you’re left to explain with residents and partners what’s happening with the project and what next steps are. And if there’s no funding attached, it becomes very difficult to connect with*

*faculty again, because they have their own priorities and structures in place to get involved.” [INTERVIEW 0005]*

*“There have been times where, again, you give a call to someone in the community that you know, but what about the people that [York staff members] don’t have contact with? And we’re scraping around at the last minute.... getting people over [to York], so it feels like more work for us. They want to do something nice, which is lovely, but it’s work for us.” [INTERVIEW 0008]*

York’s lack of cohesiveness and inability to weave together its community engagement initiatives was often raised in the interviews as a challenge. Participants expressed concern over the fact that the engagement opportunities that do exist are not readily made available or widely communicated to the community. The participants noted that there are many ambitious young people in the community, yet they often cannot access campus opportunities to get involved:

*“There are a lot of young people in our community who have a lot of varied interests... We’ve got students doing well in school, seeking opportunities but don’t know where to go to find these opportunities... they want to go to university/expand their horizons, but it’s really hard to find these opportunities.” [INTERVIEW 0009]*



# “IT’S ABOUT WHO YOU KNOW”: COMMUNITY RELATIONSHIP BUILDING WITH CURRENT ENGAGEMENT METHODS

For community workers, learning about collaboration opportunities is challenging, since a lack of a communications platform for engagement items means that community workers must informally seek University partners, which can be difficult for someone external to York to navigate. It is unclear for the community who the designated person is at York to approach:

*“When you know staff in a particular faculty, who is willing to put in a use of space permit, will cover the cost, that’s really relationship based...certain people who are able to pull strings. And we’ve seen that a lot. So it’s definitely a factor, where your interaction from York where a Jane-Finch student needs a community placement, they do the placement, and then they’re gone and that doesn’t necessarily have an immediate/direct connection with York. When their placement is over they wouldn’t know how to navigate the system. There’s very few of us who have spent enough time at York that we can understand how it works. So that we can negotiate and know who is best to go to, who we can trust. I think the average resident doesn’t trust anyone at York, and they wouldn’t know who to go to.” [INTERVIEW 0005]*

Some of these issues of relationship building with York have been addressed with the TD-York Community Engagement Centre (CEC), a satellite office located in Yorkgate Mall at the corner of Jane Street and Finch Avenue. Founded in 2008, the intent of the Centre is to establish “the foundation for a highly visible pan-university teaching, research and resource facility that will benefit students, faculty and the community-at-large within the Black-Creek community” (York U TD Engagement Centre, 2015). According to a 5-year review of the Centre, the CEC contributes to the University and the Jane-Finch community in various ways. Namely, it assists with “enriching educational experiences of students; promoting civic engagement of York community members; reducing or eliminating barriers to postsecondary education; providing fertile ground for new

community/university collaborations; encouraging depth and breadth in collaborative research partnerships” (Pitt, 2013). The 5-year review also states that the CEC “will also be part of a coordinated institutional structure/mechanism to respond to community requests and opportunities for university-community collaboration” (Pitt, 2013). During conversations with community respondents, the CEC was unanimously acknowledged and praised, although it was agreed upon that the Centre is limited in resources and capacity and it is not intended to be a resource hub for the every-day resident (Interviews 0010, 0009, 0008, 0007, 0006, and 0005).

The overall sentiment was that York’s absence of a University-wide (and community-friendly) engagement model contributes to the precarious nature of community-university relationships. Although the CEC is an important step, it does not satisfy the need for a broad, well-implemented model of engagement between York and its neighbouring community. As a way forward, participants suggested an improved communications strategy as a means of empowering the community through broadly and effectively conveying information on available engagement opportunities:

*“It’s communication, right? It’s making sure the information is out there, as opposed to waiting for a phone call from someone you know.” [INTERVIEW 0008]*

*“You want to put the choice back into the community. And residents, who can go ‘I’m interested in this area’ and pursue that.” [INTERVIEW 0009]*

*“To level the playing field among community organizations, [across the board communication] can help. Some of us are more in the know about York than others....It would help other organizations be just as much in the know.” [INTERVIEW 0005]*

# POWER STRUCTURES

The participants also communicated that the often-imbalanced power dynamic that exists between York and its neighbours hinders a healthy community-university relationship from flourishing. Some participants believe that York appears to constantly dominate community engagement matters, subsequently resulting in exploitative rather than collaborative engagement processes. This was mainly raised in relation to research that is conducted on (rather than with) the community by members of York (be it staff, students or faculty). This has been an ongoing point of frustration for members in the community, so much so that the recent TSNS Task Force referred to York and others' treatment of Jane-Finch as a "laboratory" (2015). York-led community research is critiqued by participants for not channeling back into the community or helping to provide benefits in any way:

*"You keep sending students out here to do research, but we never get your research/data. How do we hold you more accountable?" [INTERVIEW 0009]*

*"I've had students from York do research projects, they see the community as a good place to get some research, to get some data, we get this a lot. But how best is this really connecting the University with the community?" [INTERVIEW 0008]*

*"We were having this conversation with youth the other day – and they were like, 'Why do we have to talk about York? We're talking about Jane-Finch. York is this separate thing.' It was this very clear line, and some of them who were talking were around 18, and since they were in middle school they've taken part in research studies from York that they don't understand, and that's their perspective – that they're always prying into our lives and that we don't understand them, what do they want from us, what do we have to give them, like what's that relationship. So it's hard; figuring out how to navigate through this really thick mess...there's a lot of...pain around the relationship between the University and the community." [INTERVIEW 0005]*

From a partnership aspect, friction is sometimes experienced between the community and the University in regards to the devaluing of lived experiences over academic "expertise":

*"We've had some good experiences, but within those projects we've had pushback. We've had instances where [faculty members say] 'we really like this, we're going to do this, but we don't like this aspect and we're going to instead do this for the community/our approach is the better approach'. So we've fought back on some things with faculty partners, and in some cases this has caused a rift, and eventually you get over it, but it's like that interaction with academic egos and them assuming that they know what's right because they're the educated professionals and you're the community worker and there's not always that valuing of your being more experienced because they don't know how to relate to that. So it's definitely something we've dealt with." [INTERVIEW 0005]*

# YORK'S PLANNING & DEVELOPMENT MATTERS

Community planning issues are of particular interest for this project, especially in light of the upcoming development changes slated for the campus. This project aims to test the level of planning awareness within the community, and assess the opinions on large-scale development and how this would impact the community.

## Transit Projects

Some participants critiqued the University for not being an ally to the community when faced with physical expansion opportunities with external partners. For example, the Toronto-York Subway Station Extension (TYSSE) project is perceived as favouring the institution by anchoring the subway stops around the University, rather than connecting to the Jane-Finch community, which is one of Toronto's most densely populated areas (James, 2012). A lack of transit connectivity can contribute to fragmenting a spatially marginalized community even further, since many residents do not have access to a vehicle and rely on public transit for mobility. Based on this, it is even more important to ensure inclusion of Jane-Finch in subway conversations. The common sentiment expressed on the TYSSE project is reflected below:

*"Subway stops purposely bypass the neighbourhood, that's what most people feel. There are serious social-cultural barriers with new development happening, people probably feel they won't be able to access amenities like a new grocery store, that's going to be for 'York people and not for us'." [INTERVIEW 0005]*

The University's failure to safeguard the community's interests in transit discussions such as the subway extension project – which directly affect the Jane-Finch community but exclude the community's input – further enhances the distrust with which the community many times views York. Community members also expressed that the University does not support the community's interests on external developmental matters

that could elevate the community. An example of this can be seen with the Finch LRT project. After much debate, the highly contentious project was recently approved, a monumental step for Jane-Finch as the LRT directly serves the community. However, York's involvement in this battle was unclear to community members:

*"I haven't seen York at meetings like the LRT meeting...the subway – the benefit is to York, because students will get there easier. The LRT – the fight that we've had to get the LRT for many years, and now it's finally announced and it's coming – but again, York hasn't been involved in this transportation issue. Maybe in ways that we don't know...they may have had their own conversations. I'm sure they've been a part of subway conversations, but we're not seeing it from a community point of view. They have a huge investment to get that subway there, and even the LRT. People coming from Rexdale to Jane-Finch to York." [INTERVIEW 0008]*

The participant above expresses the beneficial connection that the Finch LRT has in linking Jane-Finch directly to the Keele campus. This transit project would advance integration and connectivity with the greater community - principles that are outlined in the York University Secondary Plan (2010) and the more recent Lands for Learning Phase 1 Report (2014). Despite these benefits, the University's level of involvement in this transit project is unclear to community members, contributing to a tense planning relationship.

# YORK'S PLANNING & DEVELOPMENT MATTERS

## The Community's Stake in Long-term Land Use Development

When asked about the upcoming edge precinct development planned for the Keele campus, the community participants' responses were mixed. What is intriguing is that some participants did not express interest in engaging in York land use planning and development matters. The reason behind this indifference is that some community members cannot foresee direct community benefits from campus development, particularly inner land development (for example, with the Quad student housing project, or the recently completed Lassonde School of Engineering building). The spatial distance between Jane-Finch and the University plays a role, as does the transportation cost of getting to campus. Most crucially, community members do not have a reason to commonly interact with the campus' built environment, resulting in a lack of concern in the form that these buildings and the rest of development take:

*"If people don't go on the university [campus], then why would they be interested? I go on campus because I ride my bike, there are bike lanes...my husband goes on campus to grab the free newspaper. But the interests of the community will be at Keele and Finch. We know the subway is there, and there's going to be condominiums going here. That's going to have a huge impact on our community, because they're not building social services there to respond to the issues in our community, we know condo owners will go in and buy 3-4 units and then rent them to students and other people...that, to me, creates another set of issues."*  
[INTERVIEW 0008]

According to the participants, the community is significantly more interested in using the upcoming development as a means of economically empowering the local community. It was unanimous that the best way to engage the community in a practical manner would be with the enforcement of a **Community Benefits Agreement (CBA)**:

*"If you get the community residents in there to do the building/trades, #1 you have increased employment for our community, but #2 you have the residents going onto campus. To me, that's a very practical thing that could be done. Buildings that are happening now, do they have the CBA?"* [INTERVIEW 0008]

*"York's self interest [is] in it as well, as there are people in the community who are able to take those jobs, rather than [York] going and contracting and doing different things around the City. Most of the jobs are green collar jobs, which this community in particular could benefit a lot from in the future. They're sustainable jobs, which I think if York were invested in this, it would really elevate those who are currently at Jane and Finch instead of those that it's being gentrified for."* [INTERVIEW 0010]

*"On a personal level, I'm part of a group...we know that York University is going to be doing a lot of development, and as a result of that, we sent a letter to the President, saying "So, what are you doing to hire our youth?"* [INTERVIEW 0008]

# YORK'S PLANNING & DEVELOPMENT MATTERS

*"I think that's going to be something hard for York to grasp – in terms of "how do we do this?". I think Metrolinx is trying to work that out as well, in terms of how to navigate through that system, working with the union, community organizations, etc. It's a lot to be negotiated. It will be interesting. I would like to see York try to figure out how a student residence building or townhouses, how local residents can be trained and hired - "Drywall Union" – a lot of local unions have offices in the area. But what is the university's relationship? They will have to be pretty hands on." [INTERVIEW 0005]*

*"I think the University would have to put someone in place and work out a relationship between one community based organizational body acting as that liaison for the community hiring. Someone who knows what community benefits are, and is reporting directly to the President, which kind of happens at Metrolinx. Depends on the build out time for the Lands for Learning. If you're looking at 15+ years, that's a long period of time....I think community members would get behind the idea of local hiring if the University was willing to commit to it and there was a real agreement that was collectively generated then the residents would be like you're serious, needs to be concrete and realistic and easy for community to navigate and not be another way of putting barriers." [INTERVIEW 0005]*

# COMMUNITY CONSULTATION ISSUES: A CLOSER LOOK

## **"It's a done deal"**

Some community participants expressed frustration because they feel that community consultation on York developmental matters does not take place in an authentic manner. Participants are critical of consultation that brings in the community after major decisions are made:

*"So they might let neighbours around the University know about [developmental matters], but when you go it's a done deal...they had said that it was affordable, I was curious, so I went. Two things – it was all designs, it was already done; the room was set up with these beautiful plans and so it didn't feel like there was any consultation. It felt like 'here's what we're doing'. And when I asked, 'How much is rent for students here? You said affordable rent, and that's wonderful' and they said '\$900/month'. And I said, 'Sorry, but that's not affordable' because at Fountainhead, just down the street, you can get a bachelor's apartment for just \$700." [INTERVIEW 0008]*

*"It's a done deal anyway...As opposed to going out to the community and saying 'Tell us what you need in order to support the community.' ... then you get more of an interest. Because when has York come out and said, 'What do you need? What can be built that would benefit both of us?'" [INTERVIEW 0009]*

*"Selling land to Tribute communities to build housing that was basically to be turned into student rooming houses, did not in any way create better relations with the community. Didn't provide any services to the community." [INTERVIEW 0007]*

*"I know somebody from our community that went to all those [York University Secondary Plan Update] meetings, and he was pushing for affordable housing on that secondary land, [so] that people in our community could go and live there for low rent. Hasn't happened, not going to happen that we're aware of. You can go, you can say these things, but if they don't happen, what's the point? He feels very much like, 'I went to all these meetings and I fought for housing, I fought for a community centre because it seemed like York University wanted to do this, but ten years later it still hasn't happened.' He's more of an informed resident, he understands these kinds of issues, but if you've got somebody who is low-income, isolated and going to these meetings, it's a lot of consultation but what the community wants is to see the results. They want to see affordability, they want to see access. In all this planning, we hear words but we haven't seen results." [INTERVIEW 0008]*

# COMMUNITY CONSULTATION ISSUES: A CLOSER LOOK

## Lines of Community Engagement Efforts Inaccessible to Community

According to one community worker, in the community itself there is “a lack of knowledge and language around these planning issues” (Interview 0005). Participants suggest that as a result of lower socioeconomic status, residents may not find it feasible to attend weekday evening meetings, which is often when City-led community consultations take place. Attending these meetings involves making arrangements for childcare or taking time off work (as many community members work shift jobs):

*“The impediments which prevent people from participating – just like going out on Election Day - is because they are trying hard to make ends meet. That is impeding them from participating holistically and politically. The political processes - all types of processes for the betterment of the community - would necessitate them to take time off work, and the opportunity cost to them, which might add up to them not being able to pay the bills at the end of the month...it’s a cycle.” [INTERVIEW 0010]*

*“We’re really caught up in the real equity issues of the neighbourhood. And there’s constant things happening; can’t cut this service, greater minimum wage, job security and there’s all these compounding issues [that] to be able to have the space to focus on the future is really difficult. We all have a role to play to make sure this conversation is happening and to not get caught up too much on the present all the time and what the separation has been between York and the community. I think that’s still a pretty big hurdle for people.” [INTERVIEW 0005]*

As stated, long-term planning changes are difficult for the Jane-Finch community to prioritize, participate in and be informed on when they are facing more pressing issues on a daily basis.

## Difficulty in Capturing Diverse Community Perspectives

It is important to achieve a wide range of opinions on any community project. Community participants pointed out the challenge of achieving a broad level of community input, especially considering the complexity of the Jane-Finch community. When discussing an experience as a community group member working with Metrolinx, one participant notes:

*“[Metrolinx] thinks that working with us means that their community engagement is done. Because we ‘represent’ the community’s views. But we still haven’t figured out how to get broader community input. Metrolinx won’t do that. Puts the onus on the community group to fundraise, seek input, onus on a few people who are already engaged in multiple projects. Already have too much to do. That could backfire; people like me are suddenly in charge of fixing the relationship and these structures, and that really can’t fall on all these individuals/workers.” [INTERVIEW 0005]*

As expressed from the example above, community consultation runs the risk of essentializing the community’s view and producing tokenistic engagement because it is difficult to capture the community’s diverse and complex range of opinions.

# DO CURRENT MODES OF ENGAGEMENT PRODUCE LARGE-SCALE IMPACT?

The community participants have all engaged with York through their own community work, and were familiar with other examples of York-Jane Finch engagement programs, past and present. A common sentiment expressed by the community participants was that although there are undoubtedly several positive examples of engagement partnerships between the University and the community, due to the fact that this is done on a small scale, what results are incremental effects of progress rather than a complete shift in the approach to university-community engagement:

*"Well, what about the Westview Project? Which is 25 years old, where students from Westview Centennial HS, get to do projects...a few students get to go and work in Astronomy department, Music....[these initiatives are] all very nice. But they're all very small. They make little change." [INTERVIEW 0007]*

Often, while well intended, university attempts with outreach in the community are sporadic rather than regular:

*"Recently, we received a call from someone at York and they said 'We'd like to provide ice rink time for kids on a Sunday on this date. Can you send x number of families and youth on this day?' Well that's lovely, but it's like once....It is just like gestures." [INTERVIEW 0008]*

To address this challenge, community participants propose that methods of involvement be diversified to produce more meaningful and effective outcomes. Adopting a creative approach to engagement strategies could help to build on existing positive relationships. Recognizing the limitations of current engagement practices and not being afraid to be open minded in what may perhaps be a ground-breaking new approach is important.

The need to be comfortable with trying something new is conveyed through comments like the following:

*"What could the Social Work department. Geography, what more could they do if they really put their minds to it and wanted to work with the community so the community is a source of knowledge, workers and capacity? What could they come up with in terms with ideas? And who would they talk to, would it be the same ten people in the community that they always talk to?" [INTERVIEW 0007]*

*"I think it would be necessary to be more flexible with these [community consultation] meetings, times, schedules, people have a say in what is the consensus for when they are best available, more dates, try to be more creative around scheduling... Be more state of the art in terms of how people can get involved. And have more frequency/flexibility with the scheduling. And publicity as well. In addition to receiving things in the mail. Also young people...should get young people involved in dispersing information as well. Engaging people with flyers under doors... I think no means is too extreme to get people too involved in their future." [INTERVIEW 0010]*

*"Some faculties are already sensitive to the community and have built some bridges, but other faculties have no relationship. Like, how do you get Engineering on board? Law is involved through CLASP, but that creates this relationship like all you provide is legal aid." [INTERVIEW 0005]*

*"Hopefully there's some more urban developers who are willing to take a chance and do something a little bit different versus developing just town homes. The last thing we need is more single-family homes around subway stops." [INTERVIEW 0005]*



# LEARNING FROM COMMUNITY-ENDORSED EXAMPLES OF AUTHENTIC ENGAGEMENT

According to some participants, the University upholds an “attitude of dominance” (Interview 0007) and does not take the time to fully learn about the community’s interests. In an attempt to move away from this imbalanced relationship, community representatives spoke highly of examples where York has tried to understand the community on a deeper level. Below are some noteworthy cases of community engagement that are positively received by the community.

*“It’s important for youth to come to York. For them to see that it’s a place where they can be. Our 2015 summer project was a partnership with the Faculty of Environmental Studies (FES) and Dr. Foster contributed her office space, software and technology training for the youth researchers that were hired by PEACH through the Canada Summer Jobs grant. The research was focused on identifying and mapping youth services and programs in the community. Youth researched (through interviewing other youth) and mapped places to eat, shop, hang-out, entertainment, services and programs. Through the partnership with FES, youth learned how to use Google maps and created their own map with the data they had gathered. The organization learned more about how much information youth have about services and programs in their own community, the places they like to visit and personal safety barriers. When the students were on campus, they felt respected, included and started to see themselves as part of the University – something they thought unattainable for themselves. For a couple of the students, it reinforced their ambitions to complete high school and envision post-secondary education.” [INTERVIEW 0009]*

*“Susan McGrath from the Refugee Centre at York did a lot of work with PEACH and the Black Creek Collective. She is a great ally at the University. She took the time...she went out to the community and connected with students.” [INTERVIEW 0008]*

*“Kinesiology. Their department has students going to Driftwood Community Centre three times a week, working with youth, and that’s been an ongoing program. Also, with Black Creek Community Health Centre, getting York students into their fitness room. So that’s been constant. I didn’t know about the Kinesiology partner until he told me during a meeting and I thought, wow. That is great. You have [York] students out in the community, where the youth are at...working in the community through an ongoing, annual commitment.” [INTERVIEW 0008]*

*“In 2000, when we started martial arts programs, we had them at the recreation centre at York, would bus them in. One of the things is these children would enter a totally different world. They would marvel at things ...it was a good connection.” [INTERVIEW 0006]*

# WAYS FORWARD

After discussing a wide array of topics, community participants were asked to envision a strategy for a mutually beneficial university-community relationship. To close this chapter, here are the participants' suggestions which touch on several of the issues discussed earlier:

*"We have to have a discussion between the community and the University to define what engagement means. Because there's a lot of ways of looking at engagement. The University [has] already built the engineering building, a medical arts building, a research building. They do nothing or very little to encourage participation by the community in the discussion on the design and planning and uses of the land and the development. So what we wind up with are fait accompli, that 'Here's a building. Why aren't you using it?' or 'Why are you complaining to us? You didn't tell us you wanted anything to do with construction/development'. So what's the engagement part of the University? Sure we have CLASP, and there's real attempts by some professors and administrators to make connections with students through experiential education, and the community through the CEC. But how much do they do? How many departments actually engage their students in going out to the community and learning about the community?" [INTERVIEW 0007]*

*"It's not a one-off. You need regular programming that goes in and out with community on campus." [INTERVIEW 0009]*

*"The way the University is moving forward, the way the subway is coming, the LRT happening, these are big infrastructure changes but none of us have figured out how to talk about that in a way (inaudible) feels like there's going to be results from it. 'Oh York is going to develop another Village'. And that will be it. Or 'the subway is just going to York...nothing is going to change...we're still going to get stuck on the awful 106/108 buses.' There's a role for community organizers to play, for York to play, the City, other stakeholders like Metrolinx to play, for people to say we're going to bridge this gap in the conversation about what all of our assumptions are about each other." [INTERVIEW 0005]*

*"Students have to come out into the community, not just planning students but it should be a part of orientation, go through the community. Have celebrations for York in the community. Make the community real, because we're real people out here, and we're not scary." [INTERVIEW 0007]*


*"I think the main thing is strategic partnerships in the fields of development which are beneficial to both parties." [INTERVIEW 0010]*

*"Seeing the community as an equal partner." [INTERVIEW 0010]*

*"Community engagement has to start with the idea of usefulness to all the community stakeholders, not just the University...Needs to be the filter under which all the new development is done. I think if they don't start doing that, then they'll never really engage. And we'll just have the same situation in 20 more years." [INTERVIEW 0007]*

*"The University may need some key people that only act as a community connection, the community needs its own people who are also only focusing on that, and everyone's job is to make sure that those communication lines are open and everything is getting fed back and forth. It can't be like the University creates all these structures to communicate to the neighbourhood but the community can't organize... community engagement plays a teaching role of trying to be in between the community and the university but without some real power and support within the neighbourhood to keep up what's happening, its hard because everything is always being channelled through multiple people to come back. So there has to be a smoother way for us to communicate equally, and it's going to be a challenge in terms of who funds that? Even just around planning/development issues, there needs to be dedicated staff. I don't know who is going to be ponied up." [INTERVIEW 0005]*

*"Hiring locals to do construction is a good start, but until there's some representation in senior management/profs you might not see a total cultural shift. We should definitely hire local residents, but let's get beyond the idea of low skilled workers. We have lots of highly trained professionals [in the community]." [INTERVIEW 0005]*



The accounts presented in this section bring some perspective to how university engagement efforts are received on the ground level. Several different challenges are raised, including the need for stronger partnerships; inconsistent opportunities for engagement; a lack of community-wide awareness about community planning impacts; a lack of assigned individuals both within the community and at York regarding community engagement; and socioeconomic barriers to seizing employment opportunities at York. Overall, the community members hold the view that a truly 'engaged university' (as York has recently committed to being in its vision for 2010-2020) must work with its neighbouring community so that it feels invested in York University. At present, the community is not permitted to use facilities or spaces on campus. The allure of visiting the campus is not strong enough, therefore most residents do not engage with the University on any level. As a result of these physical barriers, the participants strongly feel that a sound way to proceed toward a good model of community engagement is through a Community Benefits Agreement. All of these perspectives were reviewed and brought forward to members of the York University administration. The resulting conversations are discussed in the following section of this report.

# UNIVERSITY PERSPECTIVES

This chapter summarizes the conversations that occurred with members of the York University administration in regards to university-community engagement. The chapter first presents a brief overview of York's institutional approach to university-community engagement, followed by a description of the selected participants.

### **York's Institutional Approach to University-Community Engagement**

The University's ways of engaging with its neighbouring community are multi-faceted. For the purpose of this project, these community engagement efforts are evaluated with a view to understand their overall effect and impact on University-community relations, particularly since they have become more prevalent in pan-University discussions, such as within the President's Sustainability Council.

According to the President's Sustainability Council (PSC), community engagement and partnerships are considered a key tenet of sustainability. During its formation, the Council built on the University's mission statement that defines York as "a community of faculty, students and staff committed to academic freedom, social justice, accessible education, and collegial self-governance" (York University, 2015). As such, a Social Justice and Human Rights Working Group was created to reinforce the social pillar of sustainability that York is grounded on. The major focus this working group in 2009 and

2010 was to focus on the local landscape and strengthen the University's relationship with its most immediate neighbours (Foster, 2012). With this purpose, it identified several recommendations York could adopt to advance itself as a champion in community engagement. The 2009 recommendations focused mainly on the development of outreach initiatives aimed at attracting employees from communities in close proximity to York. The following year's report narrowed these objectives to include definitive tactics such as workplace training opportunities in the form of internships, skilled trade apprenticeships and other training in collaboration with the community stakeholders (Foster, 2012).

Alongside conversations within the President's Sustainability Council, in the past 5 years the senior administration at York University has specifically reflected on the institution's community engagement efforts. In 2010, the President's Task Force on Community Engagement released a report that reviewed current York University initiatives. Among other suggestions, the report conveys that the inconsistencies throughout the University - both what is being done and how engagement is implemented - suggests that engagement should be more firmly embedded as a core tenet of the University Academic Plan, resource planning processes and future strategic directions (York University, 2010).

### **The Participants**

The York University representatives approached for this study are members of the York administration who all, on some level, deal with community engagement in their respective roles. Out of the four in-depth conversations that took place, two members have been at the University for over 10 years. All of the participants were able to provide important insight on the constraints that the University faces when embarking on efforts to engage with the Jane-Finch community, as well as suggest strategies for improving the community planning relationship on different levels. It must again be emphasized that when dealing with an organization as massive as York, there is a multitude of perspectives that certainly cannot be fully captured through a handful of interviews. For instance, none of the York University participants are Faculty members, who embody an important and unique role in terms of their relationship with community partners. That being said, the participants from this phase were requested to be cognizant of this limit in the study's scope when sharing thoughts on University-wide attitudes on community partnerships and engagement.

Once again, the extended list of interview comments may be reviewed by any reader of this report (see Appendix B). This section discusses some of the common themes that emerged.

# RISK AND FEAR OF THE UNKNOWN

Several participants express that the University, like other post-secondary institutions, carries out its operations with caution and considers the level of risk associated with all endeavours, including community-university engagement efforts. Additionally, the University is constrained by a finite amount of resources, financially and otherwise, a limitation that prevents it from embarking on unconventional initiatives.

Some primary examples to articulate this include:

*“Money drives a lot of what is done and not done.” [INTERVIEW 0002]*

*“At the CEC, we put in these Catalyst Grants...and that’s a big risk for universities, to put money in hands of people who are not researchers, and let them do something with it. It’s very risky for any funder. And there’s a risk of the project failing. But we also have the chance to learn from that. And also build trust. Builds the seeds of trust and mutual benefit and respect.” [INTERVIEW 0004]*

*“The bottom line is we educate people. It’s a matter of – and this is not a personal view – when times are tough, you need to look at your core business, and where do we put our resources. Certainly, while having positive relationships with our neighbours is important, does it trump engaging new students? Or recruitment? So those are some aspects that I think are important.” [INTERVIEW 0001]*

An example of an initiative that has proven to be impactful but is in a precarious state is the York Youth Connection, a not-for-profit on-campus summer camp:

*“Over the past 5 years, we’ve seen a decline in camp enrolment. The program gets ever more expensive. Less grants, more competition because more camps come up and it is a non-profit...We don’t get money from the University. Without raising those funds, the camp doesn’t run. We raise the money, and we operate on a shoestring, and we project*

*what we will do based on [our camper numbers]. But if the money’s not there, and the need isn’t there, then we can’t just operate it based on history alone. That’s the kind of thing that is hard to share. It’s not that the University has decided that it’s done. It’s complex.” [INTERVIEW 0001]*

Some participants also believe that the University is reluctant to confront the Jane-Finch community to learn of its real needs, perhaps concerned about being unable to deliver on those needs or fearful of worsening the already contentious relationship:

*“We live in a democratic society, you have land that you are going to make into neighbourhoods, these won’t disappear, for as long as you are here, why should you not care or not want to be involved with your neighbours? It is a cultural thing. Also fear of the unknown. A lot of people don’t want to get involved because they fear that the [accountability] will be placed on them and the institution that they won’t be able to deliver on. And as a result, when they do go to the community, it’s often with an air of indifference, which obviously doesn’t get very far with the community, but also in a begrudging way. As a result, it’s not pursued with any strategic way, or planned way. From a land use and development side, none of that happens.” [INTERVIEW 0002]*

*“I think some people are afraid, and the fear is not necessarily about going into Jane-Finch, but the fear of maybe offending the community, or having been enough stories of things that have gone wrong around partnerships or efforts to work together on projects that has scared people off. I think it’s some sensitivities around colonialism, and not wanting to open that door at all, so kind of better to just stay away from it, as opposed to getting into a situation that could be seen as contributing to ongoing colonialist attitudes in a community like this.” [INTERVIEW 0003]*

# REFLECTING ON YORK'S PERFORMANCE WITH RESPECT TO COMMUNITY-UNIVERSITY ENGAGEMENT

The University respondents agreed that while others often perceive York University as a singular entity, it is in fact a sum of many parts. These parts are not always united, and it can be challenging to manage these separate components when there is not a broader strategy or centralized model in place:

*"When a community member says 'York does/did this'...well who was it? A student who had a misconception and had a negative view by Jane-Finch, do they speak on behalf of York?" [INTERVIEW 0004]*

*"When [community members] say York, who is York? What is York?" [INTERVIEW 0002]*

*"As much as people perceive this, I would contend that York is not a whole. By that, I mean that it's an institution that embodies a whole bunch of parts. For the institution to engage with the community in some of the ways that some of these quotations suggest, it's a matter of getting all these individual parts understanding and working together. Unless you do that, each one is going to be out there doing its own thing. It's clear when you look at the list – CLASP, YUFA, GSA, this department, that faculty...individual elements of the University that are already out there in the community and doing good work. But if you go to any one of them and say, 'Are you York?' 'No, no. We're Osgoode Hall.' The only time there's been an institutional presence is through the CEC." [INTERVIEW 0002]*

As pointed out by one participant, the University faces distinct challenges with respect to community engagement:

*"York is a very unique institution culturally. Its mandate works within the culture of York, knowing that this is a place with very deep critical thinkers, strongly opinionated constituent groups, very diverse. If we were a small university in the states with 12-13,000 students... These are not meant to be excuses, but it's the size and scope adds to the complication...There are very few urban comparatives for York*

*in Canada. We're a commuter campus as well. I had zero involvement with Jane and Finch during my undergrad, not because I was afraid, but because I was so busy commuting/working that [it wasn't on my radar]". [INTERVIEW 0004]*

After some cases where community engagement efforts were disadvantageous due to "ripple effects" (Interview 0004), the University has attempted to adjust its approach based on past experiences. For example, in the case of community representation on York committees, in one case this turned problematic:

*"[Community members] were dropping off in boards where they were needed. You have to balance that. For me, that comes with using a lens to plan keeping the wider community in mind, how do you balance the need for skill sets – people who have knowledge about issues, media, finance – everything that contributes to social capital and represents the community – but if everyone wants to sit on the York thing, who's going to sit on the Boys and Girls club? School councils? I've seen this play out. Everyone will say that people should be represented everywhere. But at what cost? You only have a certain amount of time to sit on boards. And people are going to want to sit on one that, by nature, they're committed to the issue but also consider their career, advancement, networking, there's no doubt in my mind that when we invite community members, there's a ripple effect that we don't always think about." [INTERVIEW 0004]*

# REFLECTING ON YORK'S PERFORMANCE WITH RESPECT TO COMMUNITY-UNIVERSITY ENGAGEMENT

Another example of a lesson learned can be seen with the Community Engagement Centre:

*"When the University came up with the notion of the CEC, we asked the community what they would like the CEC to do. People said everything... So we took that, and we realized that that's not what a university best offers. Agencies and community organizations have [that] expertise. What we offer is what a university can offer: education, teaching and learning. We don't run daycares, homework help clubs...it's not something we do well. That's not mutually beneficial. It's hard to sustain. It doesn't link to what we want for our students and our staff to experience...So we got out of that direct service delivery. Do we get critiqued for that? Yes. Do I think that it's still the best decision? Yes. We were duplicating services, we then ran into competition for the same amount of funding." [INTERVIEW 0004]*

The University also attempts to avoid inauthentic engagement practices and is mindful of non-meaningful modes of engagement:

*"I don't want the University's work in Jane and Finch to be seen in a charitable way. Not to 'save' Jane-Finch." [INTERVIEW 0004]*

*"When I look at other universities/colleges that might purport to be community engaged schools, when you drill in, they're doing a few events per year. Not nearly the scale [as York]." [INTERVIEW 0001]*

*"Most community engagement models are 'service-y', charitable, and the power dynamic is a bit off." [INTERVIEW 0004]*

*"I don't want surface level interaction. 1,000 students going and painting a building in Jane-Finch, or cleaning up a park. A lot of places do that. Very popular in the states. U of T does that. I don't think that's the most impactful, it reinforces 'us and them', a power dynamic." [INTERVIEW 0004]*

In regards to the possibility of institutionalizing community engagement and adopting it as a policy, similar to the way sustainability has been officially mandated at York, York administration members agree that it would be beneficial to have a model in place:

*"It used to be that engagement was kind of centralized. It was sort of Community Relations. And then, restructuring, shifts in individuals...So now community engagement is also coming out of the Provost office. Community engagement is [at Community Relations]. Also from CEC. Different faculties. So now it's decentralized. Which is great – this is a good thing. It should be shared. The problem with that is, an individual doesn't know who to go to. So there's pros and cons. We don't have a main 'place' – a branch, an office, a website. These are some of the things we've had conversations about, and the University is interested in continuing to explore what are some of the best ways we can do this. It's in the context of a number of other pieces. Austerity, we face 3% cuts across the board, I can tell you in my office alone we are constantly busy. When you have people that are so busy, to introduce something new, that gets lower and lower on the totem pole." [INTERVIEW 0001]*

A significant step in the journey to institutionalizing community engagement at York was the University's decision to make community engagement "a core tenet of our University Academic Plan", a first for any university in Canada (Interview 0004). However, it was noted that the University's existing advances in community engagement complicate the prospect of implementing a brand new University-wide policy:

*"Even before the CEC, the Faculty of Ed, Social Work, Nursing, different departments already had a history of working in Jane-Finch since the mid 90s. So it becomes hard to say we are officially institutionalizing something, when already those pockets...I would say 50-80% of the initiatives we mentioned in the Inventory were already happening before we launched the Centre. So we're kind of, institutionally, playing catch up." [INTERVIEW 0004]*



# REFLECTING ON YORK'S PERFORMANCE WITH RESPECT TO COMMUNITY-UNIVERSITY ENGAGEMENT

Participants also pointed out that institutionalizing sustainability carries incentives that are not found with community engagement in the same way:

*"Sustainability is the 'soup du jour', and there's global recognition. It's reputation building. People are always talking about sustainability. Community engagement, I hesitate to say, is not as glamorous anymore. I think it had its time, in some respects. Initiatives like CBAs are bringing a new twist to community engagement, and are the latest innovation in that area."* [INTERVIEW 0002]

*"How do you measure, how do you justify [community engagement]...how do you even define what that is? With sustainability, you cut x, y, and z, you can actually see the results clearly. Whereas with community engagement, is someone engaged when they come onto our website? Is a partner someone who signed a memorandum of understanding, or are they a partner because they have a longstanding unauthorized, if you will, opportunity to access certain space? How do we define that?"* [INTERVIEW 0001]

# THE UNIVERSITY'S AWARENESS OF JANE-FINCH

University participants believe that the institution does not have a clear, comprehensive sense of the Jane-Finch community's perspectives, needs and values. Some members of the University have a deeper understanding than others, but broadly speaking the level of Jane-Finch awareness appears to be low.

*"I've said in meetings...our community members are similar to Jane-Finch residents...people don't believe it. It sounds ludicrous...People from university, I tell them there are really skilled people in Jane-Finch with lot of expertise/knowledge, I know that because I've worked there. There are people at York who will be like 'Yeah, right'". [INTERVIEW 0004]*

*"The University sees Jane-Finch as this monolith. As though if I say Jane-Finch, everything knows what I'm talking about. When it's a diverse community with a range of people and perspectives and experiences." [INTERVIEW 0004]*

Moreover, frustration was expressed over the inconsistency evident within the Jane-Finch community. Participants feel that there is an absence of an internal consensus on what Jane-Finch wants its relationship with the University to look like:

*"One of the challenges that I have found is that there are very different perspectives and the community is not organized as one voice. Nor should we expect that. But how do we know as an institution that we are really engaging, when [who we engage with is] the loudest voice?" [INTERVIEW 0001]*

When describing an initiative that involved numerous Jane-Finch community partners, one participant recalled there being strong conflicting opinions during the planning process:

*"That was very challenging for everyone at the table. There ended up being a lot of in-fighting. And I would imagine there are some folks*

*who are probably never going to speak to each other again...and our intention was, we're [York] a partner at the table. We are not leading, not directing. It was difficult, we did end up moving forward...we had x number of people sign up...and I would say that half of them ended up showing up. The other half just dropped off, didn't show up....our partner ended up having to take that as a financial hit, because they had fronted the money. So from a partnership perspective, internal to the Jane-Finch community I think there are challenges." [INTERVIEW 0001]*

As a way to address this problem, one participant proposed that there be a collective agreement formed that is broadly endorsed by the community, to make it clear to York (as well as other actors) what the common community values and characteristics are:

*"You need to demystify it in your own mind first before you can expect anyone else to demystify it. You have to be comfortable with who you are in your own skin and be simple about it. [Community members] can't just turn to the institution on the feeling that 'They're a bunch of highly educated people over there, they can sit back and tell us what's wrong with us and come up with a plan to fix us.' It's got to be a 2-way street...the challenge will be when the community creates their defining elements, it's got to be accepted. It has to be cohesive. There can't be discrepancy. Everybody's got to buy into it. And I don't know how easy that will be." [INTERVIEW 0002]*

*"They have to come together, start defining who they are, what they want to be. And create that new perception that they want taken out into the rest of the world, whether it's York, GTA, nationally, etc." [INTERVIEW 0002]*

# COMMUNITY BENEFITS AGREEMENTS

A Community Benefits Agreement (CBA), according to the community participants, is one of the most practical ways to improve the university-community planning relationship. CBAs have a great deal of potential to rebuild the community's trust with the University, as historically there is a lot of pain and frustration in that relationship. Below are some of the comments that emerged when discussing CBAs with York University participants.

Institutional awareness of Community Benefits Agreements is extremely low. The concept was introduced in 2009 in early conversations (albeit in different terms), but was not sustained and slowly dissipated before developing further:

*"We were talking about it and people didn't know what we were talking about because no one in Canada was talking about it. I did get the VP Finance and others to start talking about it. We got some recommendations in very junior language, 'baby seeds of CBA'."* [INTERVIEW 0004]

*"Now, this is an issue when things aren't institutionalized...[when things shifted] it kind of sat there. I don't think we made sure that people got what we had talked about, and we didn't ensure that it translated to the people who took over those roles. And so, it got lost a little bit. This was in the recommendations around 2009...Then it got watered down. We didn't have the right language, we talked about things that people hadn't seen. So we could have done it better."* [INTERVIEW 0004]

*"I think the pushback [in 2009] was: everything has to be fair and equal. And you can't designate one person just because they live in the community. I don't buy that argument...even Noël Badiou, he's a lawyer, worked in Manitoba, all the time they had employment equity strategies where they had to hire x amount of Aboriginal peoples, and it was not against the Human Rights Code. In York, you can self-identify if you're*

*visible minority, a woman, etc...but I don't think there are set targets for [local hires]."* [INTERVIEW 0003]

One participant notes that in present day, "the institution doesn't even understand what a CBA is":

*"Not many in the institution are aware of what they are/could mean for the institution. As a result, it hasn't been elevated to a point where a decision could be made by the University, where it could commit and say yes, we will enter into CBAs for all future projects...they're [university administration] not there yet."* [INTERVIEW 0002]

## The Potential for CBAs at York University's Keele Campus

Overall, there seemed to be general consensus that CBAs in future land development may translate into positive York-Jane-Finch community relations. However, some comments revealed that "one size does not fit all" with CBAs; in their current structure, CBAs may not be suitable for small-scale projects, particularly those being developed over a short timespan:

*"I don't think the principle of CBAs transcends every scale of project... let's take the Quad development. It'll be in construction for 18 months to 2 years. What can you really derive from that short term, with a builder that will be there and gone, to really translate into a meaningful, long lasting effect in the community? The Crosstown project is a multiple year, huge value, billions of dollars, you need a scale which is going to make it easier on various levels to really have a beneficial CBA."* [INTERVIEW 0002]

# COMMUNITY BENEFITS AGREEMENTS

Instead, CBAs may be most effective in more multi-year large-scale projects:

*“While a project like the Quad may not be amenable, maybe if we had a big institutional developer and we entered into an agreement where they would take 20 acres of land and it would take 10 years to build it out, like the railway lands, then there may be opportunity. Because you can get in on the ground floor, or there’s a plan that can work its way through.”*  
[INTERVIEW 0002]

The key, however, is that York is definitive about its commitment to a CBA from the very conceptualization of the project, so that developers are immediately aware that their contract to build on York lands stipulates that a certain percentage of those employed are members of the Jane-Finch community. It has to be built into the development terms of reference in the primary stages prior to when York’s development partner, YUDC, enters the market and seeks out developers:

*“If we don’t act now, it will shortly be too late. Contracts will be signed. Plans will be made...that has to happen immediately. I think there is potential there.”* [INTERVIEW 0003]

*“At the point [York administration] gives [YUDC] that authorization, is the point at which we have to develop, let’s call it a “Development guideline/Terms of Reference”. In that, apart from the narrative on the kind of neighbourhood we want, and some of the design directions, would be the reference to ‘oh and by the way, over the time that you’re going to take the 5-15 years to build these 30 acres out, we want you to enter into a Community Benefits Agreement, that you’re going to have x % of people working on the construction site be from the Jane-Finch community’. That’s the time at which you flush out the details. But when you go out to the market, you have to be up front with everybody, you cannot surprise them after.”* [INTERVIEW 0002]

There was also the opinion that CBAs must be properly implemented, meaning designated staff is specifically dedicated to this effort:

*“I think to do [CBAs at York], it needs to be done right. Someone, or perhaps a team of individuals who are dedicated to that, instead of it being off the side of someone’s desk. Then it doesn’t have the same kind of attention and I don’t think that’s something that you want to cut corners with. I think there’s all kinds of ethical...if you’re going to open it up to locals, what that means, the process related to that, I know that there’s a whole structure for CBAs, which is great. I think that would be really important for that story to be told, from the beginning. In order to maximize on that, I think it’s also an opportunity to share. ‘Okay, this is what we’re doing, let’s start to change that narrative a little bit’.”*  
[INTERVIEW 0001]

One participant pointed out the reasons why Metrolinx has a stronger incentive to commit to CBAs in comparison to York:

*“For Metrolinx, a light bulb has gone off on a number of fronts. #1) They are a direct creature of the province. There are political masters that I’m sure are influencing them. #2) Their mandate is to build a regional transportation network that is going to take many years to do. They can build into their operating plans that [designated CBA expert] individual, because they know that there’s 25 years of work, they’ve been led to the conclusion that they have to embrace the concept of CBAs and build them into their project. So, the incentive? Is from above – Queen’s Park. The business case? The cost to put one person on this task is not huge in comparison to the billions being spent on this project. And that’s how they deal with it. And then they work with community organizations like Toronto Community Benefits Network....I honestly can’t see, in the short term, how York could reach a conclusion to reach that kind of similar step...I don’t see a parallel.”* [INTERVIEW 0002]

# A CHANGE IN STORYTELLING REQUIRED

While some participants, when reflecting on the University's performance, agree with the community sentiment that "there is a lot more we could be doing" (Interview 0004), members of the University also expressed that the institution has made many noteworthy strides in community-university engagement; the problem is, its efforts are not widely known:

*"One of the biggest challenges with York is we don't do the best job with telling our own good stories. We strongly believe that; this inventory [on Community Engagement] had been completed in 2010, we were looking at making it more interactive, posting it online, etc. A project like that takes a lot of resources, things were shifted. It's not to say that there isn't an interest in [stronger communication]." [INTERVIEW 0001]*

*"We are doing a lot; I am not happy when people say 'York doesn't do anything at Jane-Finch' – actually we do a lot, we're not very good at talking about it, we're not good at letting people know what it is, I would argue that probably more than any other university in Ontario, you're not going to find another example of a university that does more in any community. The range and diversity of what we do is broad. Can it be more, can it be deeper, can it be sustainable? Yes. How? I don't know." [INTERVIEW 0004]*

*"Are we going to do a massive thing? I don't know. But it's ways to share that. Telling that story. Presenting at conferences to say this is the model." [INTERVIEW 0004]*

*"We were at the Black Business Professional Association, which is a separate fund, scholarships given to young black students across North America, a fair number of them attend York, and a fair number of trustees are alum of York, and it was hosted at the Faculty of Education at Accolade East. There's all kinds of [engagement] examples. But nobody knows about them." [INTERVIEW 0001]*

*"There's been fits and starts, but we haven't had an overall, overarching mandate to tell those stories. So we tell them piecemeal...VPRI, the Knowledge Mobilization Unit, [works] closely with many non-profit organizations in York Region, not necessarily Jane-Finch, and they really look at connecting research and ensuring that it's effective and meaningful for the community. So that's not another paper on a shelf. And they're starting to build up their bank of stories, because they want to share what they're doing. The CEC is another example....we engage with all kinds of people, but the challenge is that we don't have a repository where our stories are housed and a marketing campaign related to how we share them with the community." [INTERVIEW 0001]*

*"I was at a meeting in Jane-Finch and the average resident doesn't see York's presence in the community. But part of it is that York's involvement in the community is what different members of the community have asked. We sit on their committees, we sit on their boards, but does the average resident know that Jenny Foster is the vice-chair of PEACH? No. So involvement looks and feels differently depending on where you are." [INTERVIEW 0004]*

# A CHANGE IN STORYTELLING REQUIRED

Participants also believe that there is a stereotype about York and its students that is perpetuated within the community:

*“Who does the community think our students are? The reality is, our students are other versions of Jane-Finch. They’re from Malvern. They’re from Rexdale. They’re from [the 3rd city]. They commute 1 to 1.5 hours, they’re first generation, they’re immigrants, mostly working class, had their own challenges coming to university, NOT ALL, but a significant portion of York students. Their own reality is similar to students who grew up in Jane-Finch. We also have 3,000 York alumni who live and work in Jane-Finch. We do a postal code count every year. About 300-400 come to York every year.” [INTERVIEW 0004]*

*“If you dig in deeper....this is the common thread: ‘York doesn’t engage, they’re this monstrosity, they’re inaccessible’ – I would say that that is not true. I know that’s not true. The University as a whole – community engagement is one of our pillars in terms of our business model, it’s right there. There is interest and intention. The challenge is that we’re not sharing the results of what we’re doing. [INTERVIEW 0001]*

# WAYS FORWARD

As York advances to further strengthen its ties with the greater community, the University participants touched on several areas where improvements could be made.

Firstly, there is a clear need for the institution to unite its community engagement efforts and reflectively examine all the work that is already being done by York members in the Jane-Finch community:

*"I don't think you have to start from scratch to understand what the needs of the community are. I think there's already a huge York presence out there. It's a matter of getting those people, pulling them away for a minute, and asking 'So, what have you learned all these years? Tell us the needs from your perspective.' But somebody needs to stitch that all together and create an institutional position. And nobody has been given that mandate." [INTERVIEW 0002]*

*"[In the] York side of the equation: How to bring together all the various tentacles already reaching into the community, how do you make them behave as one from an institutional perspective?" [INTERVIEW 0002]*

*"And they've appointed Lorne Sossin, the Dean at Osgoode, by the President to be the Advisor on Community Engagement. I think there was some hope that this will put a higher profile to the committee, to get things going. But you need someone to really push it. The Dean isn't going to have the same ability to figure out this structure/relationship." [INTERVIEW 0003]*

York administrators could also work together and maximize on the information that has already been gathered:

*"It needs to be a mutual benefit, we need to learn as well, as administrators, rely on that student research, and learn how can we rally as a community and not just as administrators make these decisions. We need to be informed. I think this is an example, where these pieces can come from all types of directions." [INTERVIEW 0001]*

York has been the forerunner in conceptualizing ideas such as CBAs, but it was not described and launched in the best possible way. An idea like this can be revived with the brainstorming from the right combination of people::

*"We were actually ahead of the game, but we didn't describe [CBAs] right, we moved on, it got lost, and it could be revived." [INTERVIEW 0004]*

Continuing to provide a space for community-university conversations to occur through the CEC and other York affiliates was suggested:

*"I was talking about the idea of creating a York Alumni for Jane-Finch Chapter. There's a lot of us who graduated from York who work/live in Jane-Finch, maybe that's where we have the conversation." [INTERVIEW 0004]*

*"Continuing to provide space to have conversations. And having those forums ahead of when decisions are going to be made. Sometimes, those are just [tokenistic]. I think that's an important piece....But then you will get agendas. This is what happened with Connect the Dots. It was really, from the beginning, this pitting – that 'you [York] don't do this for us, and you don't do this' that shuts people down. How do you ensure that you arrange for a space [that doesn't have this issue]?" [INTERVIEW 0001]*

*"When something gets done by one of our community members that is wrong, for us to have spaces and places where we can say, 'That was not correct'. So when Excalibur did what Excalibur did, the people I know at Jane-Finch, I told them, that is not the view of the University [at large]. I don't hold that view." [INTERVIEW 0004]*

# WAYS FORWARD

Participants had specific ideas for creative engagement initiatives that they would like to foresee in the future for York University and Jane-Finch:


*"I think when you say where we see the [CEC] future we have been trying to play with the idea that we want to flesh out this year, around maybe a certificate program for residents who are doing community work either as volunteers, or small very grassroots initiative. Or who were working in community development somewhere and are now here and their credentials aren't recognized here. Could we offer a course that would be geared to a resident that would kind of help build and recognize their leadership skills? The problem is, how do you pay for it?" [INTERVIEW 0003]*

*"Maybe an innovative developer will come up and in time find the opportunity to do something like that. Like taking the high-rise condo at Jane and Shoreham, the eyesore, taking that and right next door is a TCHC neighbourhood, and taking that and doing something innovative there. You've got the school there already, right across the street. You bump up density, and run the Jane LRT right up Jane St. Access to transit, jobs, etc." [INTERVIEW 0002]*

*"Maybe we have a network with up-and-comers in their early career who are working/living in Jane-Finch, people up and coming (under 30) at York, and within the not-profit sector. Create a network of young people in the early stage of career, diverse backgrounds, and then they become some kind of support for each other. I envisioned where, regionally, we could have an impact where when you move up in your career you know all these people, and you have this network, if we could construct your LinkedIn who had their grounded social justice experience/knowledge and all went places and moved up. Rather than convince the senior (50-60 year old) leaders, whose career trajectory is probably short, if we worked with the 25-30 year olds, we could really create some kind of change. Because who knows where you can end up? You could be at the City. You could be at the Province. Your Jane-Finch network colleague could be here, etc. It would change the way in which networks change from an employment/structural*

*perspective. And you see models of that. There's probably a group for Bay St lawyers, Bay St accountants, they're all networks. Well, why don't we have that?" [INTERVIEW 0004]*





The empirical data presented in this section illustrates some of the challenges that the University encounters with respect to community-university engagement. These challenges range from internal issues institutionally due to community engagement not being officially enforced at York; a lack of cohesive understanding of the Jane-Finch community's needs and values; a lack of widespread awareness on the initiatives that the University is excelling in on the community engagement front, among others. Additionally, the feasibility of Community Benefits Agreements are discussed, and this group of respondents agree that while there are potential advantages to this framework, mobilizing and implementing Community Benefit Agreements will be challenging, and may have to be uniquely fitted to suit the York-Jane-Finch context.

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# APPENDIX A - ADDITIONAL COMMENTS (PHASE 2)

## University's acknowledgement of its place within the community

A key characteristic of a sustainable university is one that acknowledges its locale as it relates to the surrounding community in which it is situated. Based on the conversations with the community participants, there is strong public consensus amongst Jane-Finch community members that the University currently does not acknowledge its place within the greater community.

A sample of statements that articulate this argument includes:

- *"At the end of the day, that is where the university is. Only if you wanna be in a vacuum [otherwise] they can't really escape their environment." [INTERVIEW 0010]*
- *"York University built the Community Engagement Centre under Lorna Marsden's tenement, and I think that made [York] much more visible in the community, to have an office in the community." [INTERVIEW 0008]*
- *"Over the years, I know that in all the buildings that go up, York University operates as an island." [INTERVIEW 0008]*
- *"It's really a distant planet." [INTERVIEW 0006]*

Despite some physical "linkages" university hasn't fully maximized on these:

- *"There's bridges going into the community that are going into the University, between community and the university, but there's been very little done by the University that has all of these resources available compared to the rest of the community. Nothing really welcoming or encouraging to the community to participate." [INTERVIEW 0007]*

## Negative Perceptions of Jane-Finch

York is perceived by many in Jane-Finch as not supporting the community in beneficial ways. For instance, the community voiced its concerns about the failure of the University to more closely monitor its student media (primarily its main campus newspaper, The Excalibur) that has, in the past, misrepresented the Jane-Finch community as one ridden with violence

and crime. Some community participants felt that York is not doing enough to remove the stigma and negative perception of Jane Finch:

Some primary examples to articulate this challenge include:

- *"The students at York come from all over the world. They hear of Jane and Finch and go, "Oh my god, I have to stay away from Jane-Finch!". How much of that is perpetuated within campus, we don't know. The fact is that York must be invested in, and partner with this community and change that perception. They ought to be trying hard to change that perception, because they don't want people NOT going to York based on its reputation. They should be investing prime dollars into improving and working with our community so that the reputation is good and that people come in and out. But I don't know how much on campus they do to demystify our community. I know I've taken classes on walks [in the community] and [they] are always surprised." [INTERVIEW 0008]*
- *"I went to classes [at York] for years with students who said, 'Every time I drive up Jane Street I get to Finch Avenue and lock all my doors and roll up all my windows'. Yeah - that's real engagement. (Laughs) They're afraid of the community because of the reputation. And we get articles in the Excalibur, which just make it worse. And yes, this is a poor community, this is a diverse community, we also happen to have some of the most educated people in the world living in poverty because they can't get jobs. Does that mean they wouldn't like to work with, work at the University? The University couldn't find ways to increase employment or mentorship opportunities with these people who have multiple PhD and Master degrees and decades of experience who are living in poverty, social housing? Who do they think we are? They have no idea, really. And yet, I live in a place called 'University City'. Has been since the 1970s. But now, it's mostly poor people. At first, it was university professors and administrators that wanted to live close. So I think there's all kinds of engagement possibilities. But with an attitude of the DOMINANT party - that either the community doesn't make any sense to them, or isn't interesting - that engagement is just something used to market yourself with to get more money." [INTERVIEW 0007]*

# APPENDIX A - ADDITIONAL COMMENTS (PHASE 2)

## York's Social Responsibility

Community workers shared the view that the University has a social responsibility to ensure that its relationship with its neighbouring community is mutually beneficial. A sample of statements that articulate this argument includes:

- *"York is a university that has a community which is one of the most disenfranchised in the country, compared to the university which itself is blossoming. This divergence is something which could be much better exploited in terms of benefitting."* [INTERVIEW 0010]
- *"What kind of relations [has York] developed with [the adults in the community], who have come from all over the world? Many are well educated and tremendously experienced. Not all of them are poor. A whole lot of them shouldn't be...because their credentials aren't recognized, their education isn't recognized, their language skills aren't fully up...their accents or racism holds them back. What is the University doing about that? There's a lot they could do. What is the University doing to help the community fight for more resources from the City, the province, the federal government? I don't think they're doing anything."* [INTERVIEW 0007]
- *"I've been a part of conversations that seem impressive, for example talking about community benefits in the upcoming development in the Lands for Learning. But then more senior staff are like, 'Why do we pay so much attention to Jane-Finch all the time? We need to focus on Vaughan and other neighbourhoods.' Well, Jane-Finch is one of the most impoverished and inequitable places comparatively in the city, and you're adjacent to them, and historically you have this relationship with them that is not positive. They think they can ignore it."* [INTERVIEW 0005]

## "It's about who you know" – Inconsistencies in Engagement

- *"Professor Linda Peake, who is the director of the City Institute, worked with us as a partner, and she knows Jennifer Keesmaat who is the Chief Planner for the City of Toronto. So it makes for a nice relationship. It's about networking, it's about who you know. She really enjoyed working with us. And now it's somebody that I know, that I can call on in the future."* [INTERVIEW 0008]
- *"As community organizers we tend to realize that the academic weight of having resources that we wouldn't actually be able to purchase otherwise. Went through the Community Engagement Centre, which was critical. During the time when I arrived, Marilyn had her own relationships at York, but when I approached Sue she was able to [direct me] to this faculty, this faculty, etc. We still have those friendships. It goes beyond business partnerships, because now I can call up so-and-so if I have a problem and ask her what does she think, and she'll always have an idea."* [INTERVIEW 0009]
- *"[How do you feel about the current relationship between York U and Jane-Finch?] it's extremely subjective. You can ask us three, you can ask three other people over there, it's going to be different. It's an unfair question in a way, it depends on who's involved and how connected you are."* [INTERVIEW 0008]

## (In)access to space and resources

- *"The campus itself has a lot of sports facilities that the community certainly doesn't [have] in terms of gym space, pools. But you can't access them."* [INTERVIEW 0009]
- *"There's lots of barriers to residents using York's website, it's not accessible but also, those of us who have used York's space is due to our existing relationship."* [INTERVIEW 0005]

# APPENDIX A - ADDITIONAL COMMENTS (PHASE 2)

## Planning/development

- *"I don't think that York considers its neighbours in terms of its development. It very much plans inwards for York University." [INTERVIEW 0008]*
- *"Very one-sided development. Gentrification, people getting kicked out. The wage gap - those who are disenfranchised not really benefitting from what goes in York University Heights." [INTERVIEW 0010]*
- *"When there's a wealth of knowledge and resources somewhere which can get held onto and not shared, what happens is obviously, call it University Heights, move people out, gentrify it, it's going to become very artificial. You're not going to help anybody. Relocate community members who won't be better off, just shipped off to another location in the city, the people who move in will be wealthy anyways so they're not benefitting, so really it's about doing something for the welfare of the whole." [INTERVIEW 0010]*
- *"40 students coming to San Romano way to do this charette about tower renewal, but not having spent any time in the neighbourhood, talked to community members or having any context. Just a 1-day charette to say, 'This is what we think' and everyone to just go like 'we need a gateway to identify JF more distinctly with York'. It made for an eye opening experience about how York students perceive the neighbourhood, especially around these built environment questions. Were looking at the San Romano way towers that are (26:48)... in the heart of the neighbourhood and this is how they should be improved based on our coursework. Over the years, we've interacted with students on planning projects, but definitely sometimes it's very high level envisioning, and necessarily working on the specific decision-making (inaudible)". [INTERVIEW 0005]*
- *"Instead of making contacts with people who are not within the community, looking into the community possibilities." [INTERVIEW 0010]*

## University-Community Engagement in the Past

- *"Its like a silo when I was there, lots of people around there don't face the community in any shape/form/fashion. Hopefully things have evolved, I think there are more initiatives now; I graduated in '97 and I think it was a more (inaudible) mentality, it was problematic, even the buses weren't really sharing the space, had to use Shoreham to get to York." [INTERVIEW 0010]*
- *"York didn't really become a part of the community until recent years.*

*It's attempting to be, and one of the ways is through the York TD CEC." [INTERVIEW 0008]*

## University-Community Engagement in the Future

- *"Creating initiatives, not only through York, but supporting initiatives within the community." [INTERVIEW 0010]*
- *"Creating that symbiosis so that everybody can benefit." [INTERVIEW 0010]*
- *"Give people a reason to go there. Parks won't do it (walkability). Input on planning matters won't do it. Jobs will. Meaningful ways to be engaged will. Residents can actually benefit from." [INTERVIEW 0008]*
- *"Starts with creating a win-win situation, and realizing that what the university has, which is resources, and what the community has, which is lots of people, families - need to come together and there needs to be a real sharing on a budget from which people can benefit financially as well as culturally for the university." [INTERVIEW 0010]*
- *"For me, it's that lots more work needs to be done to really connect youth with community housing, etc. to tap into their potential...in all the development with York, in some way, shape or fashion, where it's subsidized training, or access to jobs, it's one of the strongest partners in development." [INTERVIEW 0010]*
- *"Black-Creek River becomes this excuse as this physical break up - becomes a bit of a cop out, blaming the ravine as a barrier/natural boundary. Can be used to our advantage, looked at cohesively, integrated better. Long way to go in terms of existing physical environment and how new physical changes are going to look with that." [INTERVIEW 0005]*
- *"If [York] really had a good, complementary vision, to integrate people much more, the people in this community who are disenfranchised and who might not have employment, might be underemployed, help to develop their skills so that they can take part in this (inaudible) development benefit them as well, and therefore, it's more of a philanthropic - well not really philanthropic, as it is a win-win at the end of the day. And York's self interest in it as well, as there are people in the community who are available to take those jobs, rather than going and contracting and doing different things around the city. Most of the jobs are green collar jobs, which I argue that this community in particular could benefit a lot from because green collar jobs are very important for the future. They're sustainable jobs, which I think if York were invested in this, it would really elevate those who are currently at Jane and Finch instead of those that it's being gentrified for. [Instead, should be for] those who are currently living there." [INTERVIEW 0010]*

# APPENDIX A - ADDITIONAL COMMENTS (PHASE 2)

## University-Community Engagement in the Future (cont'd)

- *"Urban greenery, whether it's creating sustainable development around the university - I know there's lots of housing which has been created since I have been there, houses everywhere - whether it's urban gardening, stuff like that. Instead of making contacts with people who are not within the community, looking into the community possibilities. Whether its through the organizations like African Food Basket, those organizations really tap into the youth of the community who are in need and provide them with summer programs, so they are the ones cultivating the lands, around the university, maybe the ones who are training for specialized jobs that require more formal training, so that youth can really take part in development." [INTERVIEW 0010]*
- *"Training [community] so that they can assist in mutual development. I just think that if York were to fund local initiatives a lot more on a regular basis, create more initiatives so that young people can be involved in getting training and skills which are transferrable in the workplace, and can be used to benefit themselves and benefit the community, that would be great." [INTERVIEW 0010]*

## General comments

- *"[Need for] an honest partnership." [INTERVIEW 0010]*
- *"York is an amazing asset in the community, but hard to keep it engaged." [INTERVIEW 0008]*
- *"I think York has been incredibly responsive these days." [INTERVIEW 0008]*
- *"I don't see effort on the part of the City on maximizing the venues*

*connected to this area to showcase Jane and Finch. York has made some effort in terms of its resources. Students, graduates have come out and ...provide technical skills. That makes a difference." [INTERVIEW 0007]*

- *"The relationship between UTSC and the east Scarborough storefront, and how both of them have in their strategic plan how to...in an overarching way. It makes sense there because its one leading agency, and one satellite campus which is easier to deal with, vs. JF that has a million organizations and hard to have one take the lead on making a strategic plan. Interesting model, if the university is offering a community engagement plan, then what are the community organizations committing to? What's our policy? Being vocal, and not trying to purposely put barriers [such as the mindset that the] 'university is evil'." [INTERVIEW 0005]*
- *"Supporting and funding local people who are doing programs as well, not only with resources and finances but human resources as well/human capital. Students/staff who specialize in that field and making them have to do community work, and making this not only part of courses people who are ...should make those programs even more stronger." [INTERVIEW 0010]*
- *"[one councillor] was very vocally opposed to PEACH's move from one plaza space to the space next door. [PEACH] moved to the adjacent plaza, and [the councillor] actively went against them, and it delayed their project for almost a year. [Reason was] the fence in the back backed onto a residential street where homeowners were...I don't really understand it. To vocally go against a community organization whose working to strengthen youth...and I just think that's an example of lack of taking to heart the interests of the full community." [INTERVIEW 0003]*

## APPENDIX B - ADDITIONAL COMMENTS (PHASE 3)

Some participants agreed that in principle, the institution has a social responsibility to ensure strong, sustainable partnerships with its neighbouring community:

- *"We cannot solely focus on Jane-Finch. We wouldn't sustain ourselves in all fronts. We need faculty members to do research in Costa Rica, in York Region, rural communities, Aboriginal communities. We do that, we need to do that. But we are also spatially occupying a space where these are our neighbours. And so we have a responsibility. It's kind of like... do you not take care of your own house while you go somewhere else? That's kind of how I think about it. So I do worry about how my house is, or my direct neighbour, but I also go off into the world and do other things too. So it's not either/or, it's and. I think sometimes people just don't know that we have to do both." [INTERVIEW 0004]*
- *"Who else is going to do it? Other than community organizations. There are also communities with struggles downtown. But you also have a couple of universities and colleges downtown. This neck of the woods, there's only one." [INTERVIEW 0004]*
- *"I do see York in Jane-Finch. I think we are in the same vicinity and neighbourhood. I know there's a big geographic divide, there's a bridge, creek etc. but I do see York as in the same district as the community...I actually embrace that. I know there are people in the university and community that don't embrace that, but in my own spatial understanding, I embrace that." [INTERVIEW 0004]*
- *"I would argue that [York] IS Jane-Finch. [Some at York] would say 'Yes, we want to be the University of Jane-Finch.' I don't think that would be shared across the University." [INTERVIEW 0003]*
- *"York seen as a fluidity between York and the community somehow. Being actively involved in those community discussions...York has a responsibility to make sure local residents are well served by local transit." [INTERVIEW 0003]*

What is the University's Role in Dealing with Equity Issues/Systemic barriers?

- *"The other thing is...I have seen the applicants from Jane-Finch... and sometimes, they are not competitive due to systemic issues. York also wants to attract high-quality employees. We are in a unionized environment. The likelihood is that people will stay in those jobs. We don't want people who will not be doing well. I have seen some instances where some of them are not so strong. Because people have had sporadic employment, haven't completed their education, all of the systemic and societal challenges. What do we do with that, as an employer in a competitive job market? Even if the job is for someone who has knowledge working in diverse environments, we always have to put something related to education and years of experience, which is why we have Masters students doing secretary jobs. It's just challenging...York is not in the business of training secretaries/admin staff." [INTERVIEW 0004]*
- *"The issues in this community are complex...You look at the levels of poverty, the issues that newcomers face coming into the city and trying to find jobs and meaningful work, you look at the issues in the schools, and the crumbling Toronto housing infrastructure, and the prevalence that the Toronto community housing has in the community. They have a large stock of housing near Jane and Finch and it's crumbling. You look at the kids who are falling between the cracks at school due to mental health and learning disabilities and not getting the assistance they need. The lure of quick money and drugs and gangs. It gets overwhelming. And also it's complex and you know people's strong sensitivity to outsiders coming in, and we're all that comes from. Colonialism is kind of the word that struck me more recently, and I haven't delved seriously into that." [INTERVIEW 0003]*



## APPENDIX B - ADDITIONAL COMMENTS (PHASE 3)

The University struggles with having difficult conversations with the community. For example, foreign trained professionals are able to attend York and take bridge training programs that prepare them for work in Canada. One York participant cited that the University attempted to recruit Jane-Finch community members for these bridging programs, but ran into an issue when most of those that attended the information sessions could not speak a standard level of English:

- *“The challenge, especially given the power differential is that it is much more acceptable for the community to criticize the University and its members than the University to share its concerns about what is working or not working.” [INTERVIEW 0004]*
- *“We were told that the community has a high number of folks in that situation [of high foreign credentials and an appropriate level of English]. In order to qualify, candidates must have foreign training/work experience and have language level at CLB 7 or 8 (kind of the level of function to work in a business environment - an intermediate level of writing and speaking). We were transparent about what who we thought we could help and where they had to be at. We invited the community to help recruit potential candidates and had 2 - 3 events with 50 - 75 people at each. At each event, the majority of attendees were more at level 3 (basic). It was very disheartening as it was clear that these folks held very high positions and had high levels of education but could not read/write or a level for the programs we offer. The community was continuing to offer language class and job training, but it was still pretty clear that it was quite a way to go before anyone could reasonably expect someone to gain employment back in their field. The challenge, of course, was that our community partners would often say ‘we have really skilled people’ and only the English teachers working directly with them could we say the language capacity needs to improve (not easy to do especially as people are taking classes a couple of hours a week, trying to survive in jobs and juggle family responsibilities). As a university, we would agree that folks had real skills, lots to offer and their language capacity for day-to-day community life was good (e.g.*

*going to bank, shopping) but it was hard to tell the community that the language training/skills were not at the level needed to reasonably secure a permanent position in law, or say management position in a bank.” [INTERVIEW 0004]*

### The Role of the City

One participant strongly felt that the Jane-Finch community was subject to municipal neglect and a lack of responsiveness from its political leaders:

- *“Having been out of Toronto for a while and now coming back into Toronto, seeing this community as very marginalized, and my questions about why is this community so marginalized, and my first thoughts go to structural racism...racism and I think classism. It’s just been neglected from the City of Toronto. It is a very interesting community; there is resident involvement, it is a very family-centered community, and I would say very religious too in some ways - people have a strong kind of faith perspective. And you see it walking the streets, you ask them how are you and people say blessed. On the buses, you see people helping each other...to me, there’s a sense of community that you don’t necessarily see in like a downtown community.” [INTERVIEW 0003]*
- *“You would think the fact that it is an inner-city suburb, that the City would pay more attention to it. But you look at the streets, they’re in awful shape. The sidewalks are in awful shape. And those things wouldn’t happen in other communities in the City. Just the upkeep, to me it’s noticeable...I just think it has a feel of being neglected.” [INTERVIEW 0003]*
- *“I think in a lot of communities, people would complain to their councillor, and the councillor would try to help problem solve that. Whether that happens here, I don’t know.” [INTERVIEW 0003]*
- *“Does the fact that your political representatives don’t really work with the community, does that impact the community? When you look at the low health indicators for Jane-Finch, is there a correspondence between representatives who are not really representing the community? Is there a correlation?” [INTERVIEW 0003]*

## APPENDIX B - ADDITIONAL COMMENTS (PHASE 3)

One participant reflected on the recent Toronto 2015 Pan/Parapan Am Games, a massive sporting event that York University played host to in the summer of 2015. In an effort to showcase the Jane-Finch community as the neighbouring community for the Games, a Jane Finch Pan Am Host Committee was set up and met frequently to discuss strategies on making this event work in their favour. In the end, the event proved to have close to no impact on the community:

- *“With Pan Am at York, people wanted to maximize the potential there. But there was nothing kind of showing any promise in the community. The community thought, ‘We’ll have tourists coming through in our stores, shops, restaurants!’ and I would bet that there probably weren’t have any extra people coming through. The buses kind of rerouted them through straight to York, no kind of stop off or anything. I heard Mayor Tory say, ‘We’re showing the world the communities that we want them to see.’ And I thought, ‘Yeah you don’t want them to see [Jane-Finch], that’s clear’.” [INTERVIEW 0003]*

One participant pointed out that the City has yet to seize the opportunity of CBAs:

- *“Why isn’t the city putting its money where its mouth is? Through TCHC or whoever is building those. Maybe the people who are going to be living in those neighbourhoods after the fact can be a part of the building of those neighbourhoods.” [INTERVIEW 0002]*

One participant felt that the community could maximize the role of media, which can play a strong factor in perceptions and discourse:

- *“Malvern – do you hear as much about Malvern as you do JF? Even when their crime levels may be similar. You don’t.” [INTERVIEW 0002]*
- *“Media could be used by the community in a hugely different way to start that ball rolling. And it can’t be a one off thing; it has to be sustained. The other thing too is...who are the local champions of the community? You talk about the community being intensely proud of who they are. Who in the community is the ringleader that can take that out? Who has been successful? Who should be tapped into by the community, a CEO, a high fluting lawyer, time to give back? Careful about stereotypes – outside the box of hip hop/basketball. Who’s a VP in one of the big banks?” [INTERVIEW 0002]*

In opportunities to provide input, the University has, in some cases, seen a poor turnout from the community:

- *“[For the York University Secondary Plan Update consultation] We went to the York Woods library. City staff came, panels, presentation, Q and A, I could probably count on my hands and feet the number of “outside” members. This is where I struggle/get frustrated. Because you get these community activists who say ‘York sits there in its ivory tower and they don’t care/want to talk to us’ and then when there are processes that give them the opportunity to come engage, they never participate.” [INTERVIEW 0002]*

One participant expressed interest in wanting to learn more about how consultation practises can be better designed to “adapt to [community] circumstances...there isn’t a one-size-fits-all answer...I’d like to know what those options are, from their perspectives.” [INTERVIEW 0002]

# APPENDIX B - ADDITIONAL COMMENTS (PHASE 3)

Bureaucratic challenges - about who you know - also an issue with York. You are working within a very large system and are confined to it to some degree:

- *"There's obviously inconsistency within the University as well. There's in many cases about who you know...there's also individuals who have been around for a long time. Who know where to go and who to talk to. But when there's a shift, a change internal to the organization, it does mean that the community may have to start from scratch. Being that we're a big bureaucracy - because there isn't an institutional model or mandate that we can turn to. While we have it as a pillar, how is it operationalized? Isn't as clear. And so it can be challenging for allies internal to the organization to continue to try to move things forward. It's like shifting the Titanic, very very slowly. For instance, if I have a contact who works at Accommodations and Conference Services, and that person leaves, then I need to now establish a new relationship with that person. It's not even necessarily how the community is connecting. But if my contacts dry up, I'm faced with having to negotiate that with the community." [INTERVIEW 0001]*
- *"I think it's difficult because York is so big and so kind of siloed, that having the kind of York/big picture York ability to work with the community is difficult. So many people at York, be at faculty or staff or students, don't know the CEC exists. Know nothing about it. It's just very hard to get on the radar at York broadly, and I just haven't figured out how to do that. It's probably my biggest frustration. So I tend to rely on people who reach out to me from York and say 'we'd like to be involved in the community or with the CEC' and it's just a small handful of numbers than what could be." [INTERVIEW 0003]*
- *"Anytime you have a large, powerful institution that's perceived to be resource rich...that's how people describe structures (as monoliths). People always perceive things that way. We just have to keep at it." [INTERVIEW 0004]*

York must consider its own assets and interests while developing its community engagement::

- *"We can't control people's previous employment experience etc. At the same time, they have to hit the job running. It's not a work/study*

*position. We're invested in making sure we hire the right people, since it's likely that they will not leave the job." [INTERVIEW 0004]*

- *"Is it in the University's best interest to run children's programs, when we're required to keep records for every kid that comes through our doors...where do we keep that? Who's responsible for that? What if something happened in the camp? I come from a non-profit background, where children's safety is paramount. It is just the same here. We don't have the same kinds of support systems like a charity would have." [INTERVIEW 0001]*

Avoiding counterproductive engagement:

- *"Communities need democratic involvement of its residents and members. When York puts out a call, for anything that is for residents to sit on, the power that York has in that call in people wanting to sit on that York thing (because there is a perceived status that goes with that) means that people will sit on the York thing but not sit on a local thing that desperately needs them to be there." [INTERVIEW 0004]*

The role of the CEC:

- *"I want the CEC to play a role in transforming York. I'm not so focused on York changing Jane-Finch, but more focused on what we learn from that experience collectively and changing our practices." [INTERVIEW 0004]*
- *"To me, it's about a praxis. Its about learning to do things differently. You start with the pieces of doing research, of teaching, working together and it shows a different way of doing things. Students have the chance to do a 5-workshop course to learning what it means to do a placement in Jane-Finch so students are prepared when they enter. To me, the CEC is a model. It's meaningful impact, it's also impact on the university as well as the community." [INTERVIEW 0004]*
- *"So definitely, definitely [the CEC] door is open to the residents, and I think that storefront kind of piece is really important to maintain. But what do we offer the general resident? I think for me, it's more at this point, we don't offer like the specific program that a resident could take." [INTERVIEW 0003]*

# APPENDIX B - ADDITIONAL COMMENTS (PHASE 3)

## CBA:

- *"I don't know if they would necessarily offer the same opportunity to trigger those sorts of jobs due to duration and scale." [INTERVIEW 0002]*
- *"There's literature around institutionalizing community engagement, some of which we do and some that we don't (communicating, telling stories, we need to do that better, and making sure everyone has the same access to information)." [INTERVIEW 0004]*

## Other comments:

- *"You know where my biggest struggle is? It's at York. It's not in the community. The community is really open, and they want to work with York for the most part. And they have lots of ideas on how to do that. It's finding that York side of the connection that is the hardest part." [INTERVIEW 0003]*
- *"The CEC offers training for students who are going to be placed in the community. There's certainly an interest in ensuring that students have an open mind in where they might be placed. I would say that York is a huge organization, and we have so many individuals who are doing a lot of great things, I would say by virtue of having programs that encourage community members to get involved, like the Connect the Dots forum, like the York Youth Connection summer camp, like any other camps we have on campus, the York Lions Athletics just sent me a notice about football camp that we promote to the community. So I think that through these types of initiatives, we are continuing to open up our doors, and share opportunities. It may not be so much of a targeted 'breaking down stereotypes', but it is a matter of considering how York is not separate from the community, but we are a part of. There is a real effort in terms of shifting the language around that. It isn't an 'us and them', it is an 'us', altogether." [INTERVIEW 0001]*
- *"I would say that there's a lot of stereotypes and misperceptions for people who aren't necessarily involved in the community. So I think it can be challenging for folks that do live and work in the area to confront those stereotypes and misperceptions. I also know that those stereotypes and misperceptions can be applied to the University, in terms of how we engage with the community, both internal and external." [INTERVIEW 0001]*

**Campus-  
Community  
Connections:**  
Exploring  
Collaborative  
Planning Processes  
between York  
University and its  
Neighbours

By: Anam Sultan