

# Walkability in Toronto's Apartment Neighbourhoods

## PRELIMINARY REPORT ON WALKABILITY WORKSHOP FOR KINGSTON-GALLOWAY-ORTON PARK

February, 2009



### **Paul Hess**

Associate Professor, Department of Geography and Programme in Planning  
University of Toronto

Ph. 416-978-4955

Email: [hess@geog.utoronto.ca](mailto:hess@geog.utoronto.ca)

Website: [http:// faculty.geog.utoronto.ca/Hess/hess\\_home.html](http://faculty.geog.utoronto.ca/Hess/hess_home.html)

### **Jane Farrow**

Executive Director, Centre for City Ecology and Jane's Walk

Ph. 416-642-5779

Email: [director@janeswalk.net](mailto:director@janeswalk.net)

Website: [http:// entreforcityecology.org/](http://entreforcityecology.org/)

## **INTRODUCTION**

This document reports on a “Walkability Workshop” held at the East Scarborough Storefront in the Kingston-Galloway-Orton Park neighbourhood of Toronto in September, 2008. The workshop is part of a larger study called *Walkability in Toronto’s Apartment Neighbourhoods* that will incorporate information gathered from approximately 10 Toronto neighbourhoods. The goal of the study is to explore the ways residents living in high-rise areas get around their neighbourhoods and, especially, to highlight the importance of walking for residents in the carrying out of their daily lives. It is intended to identify what works for pedestrians, barriers to walking, and possible to the local walking environment.

In **Part One**, this report first gives some background on the overall project. In **Part Two** we describe what we actually do as part of a walkability workshop, and in **Part Three** we summarize some of the information gathered at the Kingston-Galloway-Orton Park workshop. The report is intended to give preliminary feedback to participants and others interested in the walking environment of the area. It is largely a straight forward reporting of the information we gathered and does not offer analysis or offer any substantial interpretations of what we heard. This analysis is coming as we gather more information and work with the data. As analysis proceeds, supplement reports will be produce that explore and interpret the rich information gathered in this and the other workshops in the study.

## **PART ONE: STUDY BACKGROUND**

The study is being conducted by Professor Paul Hess of the Department of Geography at the University of Toronto in association with Jane Farrow, Executive Director of the Centre for City Ecology, Toronto. Our contact information can be found at the top of this document. We welcome any questions about this report or the overall study.

The authors recognize the Social Research Council of Canada for helping to fund the research. We also are very grateful to the local community organizations that have helped us organize our workshops. In Kingston-Galloway-Orton Park this was the East Scarborough Storefront that let us use their space, organized volunteers and provided enormous overall support. Residents Rising also was very supportive. We are especially grateful to the local residents who participated in the workshop and showed such commitment to and deep knowledge about their neighbourhood.

The overall goal of the research project is to help better understand the ways people get around Toronto’s high-rise apartment neighbourhoods, especially by walking. Building on the arguments Jane Jacobs espoused more than 40 years ago, creating good places for people to walk is increasingly being recognized by transportation

experts and public officials. Planners and architects have pushed the idea of “New Urbanism,” arguing that new neighbourhoods should be built more like the Annex or Cabbagetown neighbourhoods of downtown Toronto, with connected streets and houses that directly front sidewalks. Public health researchers and officials even suggest that the ways we are designing our cities has contributed to the recent rise in physical inactivity and obesity because people no longer walk as part of their regular, daily activities.

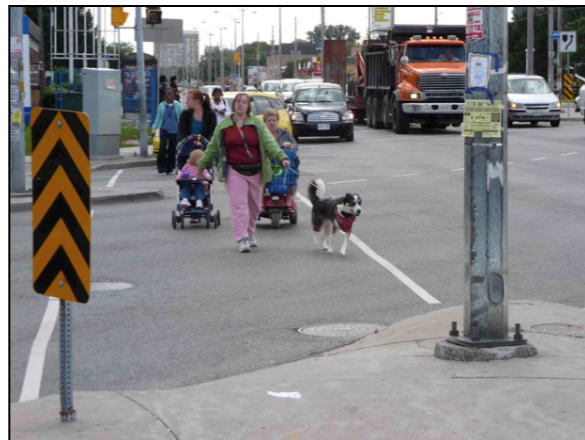
These discussions, however, are usually focused on downtown areas or new developments in the outer suburbs. This study is intended to put more focus on the many people living in Toronto inner suburbs. As people interested in making better walking environments, we believe that Toronto’s high-rise neighbourhoods area enormously important.



These places were planned and developed in the 1960’s and 1970’s. At that time, it was assumed that most of the people living in the new apartments did not have children, would move to houses as soon as they could, and would be able to drive to the places they need to go. The single-family subdivisions in these areas were, at least, designed so that children could walk to school, but the apartments on the big arterial streets were not places designed for walking.

Today, however, a different population is living in these areas, often people with limited incomes, people with children and complicated travel needs, and people who do not own a car or only have access to a car part of the time. In other words, neighbourhoods that were designed for cars now house people that must rely on walking and transit to carry out their lives. This study is intended to better understand how these residents get around their neighbourhoods, especially by walking. Our goal is to share this information with the people who live in them so they can better advocate for improvements.

This is a good time for residents to make clear what they want and need because of policies and program being developed by the City of Toronto. The City is working with local community organizations and developing policies and programs for 13 Priority Areas



that include many of the high-rise apartment areas. It is developing a “Walking Strategy” to “make Toronto a great walking city” that should include these areas. It is currently developing a “Tower Renewal” program that also promises to bring improvements to apartment areas. Finally, the City has an ambitious transit plan, “Transit City” that could bring light-rail and other transportation improvements to some of these neighbourhoods. All these initiatives offer some potential for changing apartment neighbourhoods into better places to live.

The authors do not represent the city and we do not know what will become of these various initiatives, but we strongly believe that better information about how residents use their neighbourhoods is crucially important to making positive change. For these efforts to be successful and make Toronto a better place for its residents, we believe that the residents themselves must have a strong voice and play a central role in decision-making. We are doing this work to provide both residents and the City with information to help foster this objective.

## **PART TWO: WHAT HAPPENS IN THE WORKSHOPS AND HOW ITS USED**

The workshops take place with the assistance of local neighbourhood or community organizations. The organizations recruit local residents to participate, provide a location to meet, and provide other support such as volunteer assistance for setting up and cleaning up. We strive to include a wide range of types of residents in terms of age and background and we make sure that childcare and some translation support is available if needed. All information gathered in the workshop is treated as confidential and identifying information of any participant is not collected.

### **WORKSHOP ACTIVITIES TO GATHER INFORMATION**

After an introduction to the project, three activities take place in the workshop to explore how residents travel:

#### ***(1) Survey***

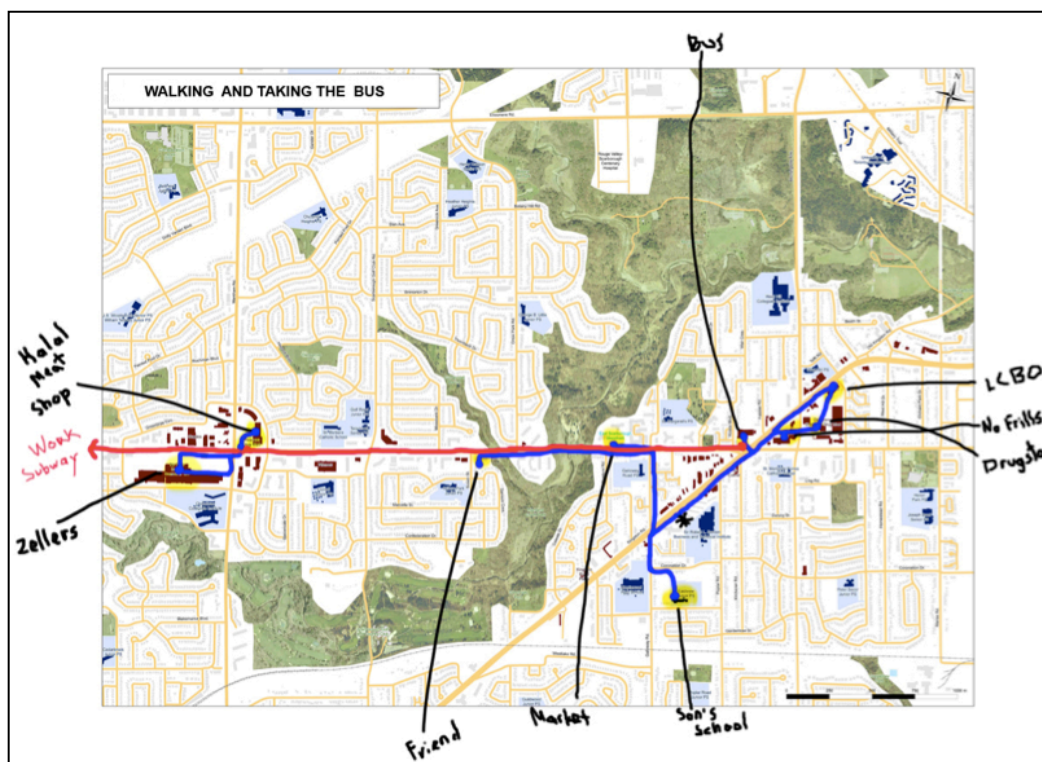
Each participant fills out a survey consisting of roughly 40 questions. The survey contains background information on the participant such as age, household income, whether or not there are children in the household, how long the resident has lived in the area, how many cars and drivers are in their household if any, etc. This information is useful in understanding the transportation needs of residents and in exploring different travel patterns by different types of people. The survey also asks more directly about the activities people travel to on a regular basis and how they get to them. For example, people are where they do their food shopping, how many times a week they shop for food, and how if they usually go shop by walking, transit, driving, taxi, etc. Finally, the survey asks a series of questions about how people find the walking environment in area, whether they feel safe walking, whether traffic is a problem, etc.

A summary of much of this information is presented below. It will be compressed and present with tables and graphs in subsequent reports.

### ***(2) Individual maps***

Participants are asked to create maps that show how and where they travel. Each participant is given a set of maps on which to draw. Using coloured pens to represent different modes (walking, bus, auto, bicycling), they are instructed to trace all the trips they regularly take during a typical week when the weather is warm. Participants are asked to show their actual routes and to label their destinations. When they travel outside of the area on the map, they are asked to note their eventual destination. This information is being entered into a Geographical Information System (GIS) that can be used to analyze the distances people travel by various modes for different activities, the types of streets they tend to use and the directness of their walking routes. This map information can also be connected to surveys for further statistical analysis.

This type of analysis is very intensive. It will be included in the final report but is not ready for this preliminary document.



Hypothetical Example of Individual Map for Walking and Bus Trips

### ***(3) Small group exercise***

Participants are asked to discuss their neighbourhood and its walking environment and public spaces as part of a small group of 5 – 8 people. Each group is seated around a large display map of the area. A member of the research team acts a



Storefront and Residents Rising. Copies for download can also be found at the author's websites. See the contact information at the top of this document for the addresses. We will give updates to this report as we continue to analyze the data. We also welcome additions or corrections by residents.

### ***(2) Final report***

A final report will be made that includes the information gathered from all of the neighbourhood's studies. This report will include a full analysis of all the data and make general conclusions about what we learned. We will discuss the walking and transportation issues in the neighbourhoods as a whole as well as compare them to each other. Like the preliminary report, we will make this report available to the local organizations that worked with us and post it on our websites. We will also provide copies to the relevant people and committees at the City of Toronto including the Mayor, City Councillors, Public Realm Office, Tower Renewal Office, and Pedestrian Committee.

### ***(3) Academic papers and presentations***

We also hope to add to the growing literature on walking and we will publish academic papers in planning journals and present at conferences based on the study. The goal is to help other planners and academics better understand pedestrian issues in these types of environments.

## **PART THREE: THE KINGSTON-GALLOWAY-ORTON PARK WALKABILITY WORKSHOP**

The workshop was held on a Saturday in September with a diverse group of enthusiastic participants. This was the first workshop to be conducted in the study and we thank the participants for being very patient with us as we learned what did and often did not work. The following summarizes some of the information we gathered from the 30 participants who completed the maps and survey and from the small group activity where there were five groups.

First, we present information gathered from the survey to describe who participated and their general travel patterns. This information is given in percentages to help better convey the range of responses but it should be remembered that numbers are low. For example, 10 percent of respondents constitute only 3 people.

The following sections then presents the more qualitative information on what people said about their walking environment.

## **WHO PARTICIPATED?**

Participants in the workshop were a diverse group of people, but should not be seen as representative of the neighbourhood as a whole. This section describes socio-demographic characteristics of the participants according to the survey.

### ***Sex and age***

About two-thirds (64%) were female and one-third (36%) male. The age range spanned from under 18, all high school students, to over 65, although few people in their late teens and early twenties (18-24) attended.

### ***Housing and household types***

Almost two-thirds of the participants (65%) live in apartments and nine-in-ten (90%) rent their homes. While most participants may live in similar types of housing, the households they come from are highly varied. About equally, people came from households of single adults, single parents, and couples with children (between about 21 and 24%). Fewer participants (14%) came from households of couples without children, with the remainder (about 17%) coming from other types of households.

### ***Income and education***

Participants were mostly from low-income households, with half of respondents reporting household incomes of under \$24,000 a year and another 19% reporting incomes of \$25,000-\$39,000 a year. Only a couple people (7%) reported income above these levels with the remainder leaving this question blank.

While income levels were low, levels of education were high, with 46% reporting attending college or university and another 21% reporting they attended graduate school. Note here that a number of participants are still in high school, so the overall level of education is remarkable.

### ***Time in Canada and language at home***

About 60 percent of respondents were born outside Canada. Many of these, though, have lived in Canada for a long time with about a half reporting that they have lived in Canada for more than 10 years. Also, while 42% report speaking a language other than English at home, only 7% report not speaking English at home at all.

### ***Length of time in neighbourhood and reasons for residence***

Most participants have lived in the area for many years, with more than two-thirds (67%) having been at least four years in the area and almost one-third (30%) for 10 years or more.

When asked the important reasons they choose to live in the neighbourhood there was little consensus. The highest response was because it was “affordable,” marked



by 24 percent of participants, followed by “to be to be close to family and friends,” marked by 12 percent, and to be “close to work or school” or neighbourhood “amenities,” each marked by 10 percent of participants.

### ***Employment***

About a quarter of participants work full time outside the home and another 12 percent do so part time. Another quarter are students. The remainder are unemployed, not seeking employment, or retired.

### ***Driver’s licence and auto ownership***

As a whole, respondents have relatively low access to cars or other motor vehicles compared to the population of Toronto as a whole. The vast majority of participants (72%) report not having a drivers licence although about half of these report that someone else in their household does hold one. About half of those reporting not having a license also report wanting to obtain one. Still, a full half of respondents report that their household does not own a car or other motor vehicle.

## **TRAVEL BEHAVIOUR**

The socio-demographic characteristics of the participants suggest a population that is highly dependent on walking and transit for meeting the needs of their households. This section describes general travel patterns of the participants in terms of how often they do common activities like shopping, where some of these activities occur – whether locally or outside the area – and the mode of travel – walking, bus, driving, biking or other modes. It confirms the importance of walking and transit for the participants.

### ***Going to work and school***

Of the participants who work outside the home or go to school, more than half (55%) do so within the neighbourhood, further emphasizing that local travel is very important for most. Most participants get to work or school by bus (48%), followed by walking (29%). Only 21 percent get to work by car, either as a driver or a passenger.

### ***Frequency and mode of other activities***

The following activities requiring travel were most commonly done at least once or twice a week by at least half of participants: food shopping, general shopping and errands, and accessing social or medical services. More than 40 percent go to a park or playground every week and about a quarter bring children to school almost every day. Walking or running for pleasure is also very common, with 69% of participants reporting they do so three or more times a week including 38% of participants that report they do so almost every day.

Using the bus and walking dominate as the usual mode of travel for these activities. For food shopping 54% of participants report they usually walk followed by 34% who take the bus. For general shopping (other than for food), 38% usually walk and 46% percent rely on the bus. For getting to social or medical services, which are much less likely to be found within the neighbourhood, bus use predominates, with 65% of participants saying they usually rely on this mode. For taking children to school, 50% report they walk while only 12% report driving. For taking children to other activities, again walking and using the bus are dominate with 31% reporting they usually use each of these modes. Unsurprisingly, nearly three-quarters (73%) report they get to parks and play grounds by walking.

### ***Where people shop***

Because shopping is such an important activity for households and requires regular trip making, several questions in the survey further asked for additional information about shopping.

Two-thirds of participants (67%) report they do most of their shopping near their home with most of the remainder shopping on the way between home and work. People regularly shop at Kingston Road and Lawrence and also at the Cedarbrae Mall. To a lesser extent, Scarborough Town Centre was mentioned as a shopping location.

In terms of choosing their shopping location participants highly rated the time to get there and the transportation they could use to get there. This mirrors the information above that shows that walking and using the bus is by far the most common way people shop. People also rated the price and quality of goods available all as highly important. The ability to combine different errands and the availability of culturally specific goods were also rated as important, but somewhat less so.

## **HOW PARTICIPANTS SEE THEIR TRAVEL ENVIRONMENT**

This section pulls information from both the survey and the small group exercise. The bus system discussed followed by the walking environment as by far the most important travel modes. More general comments about the neighbourhood and its public spaces follow.

### ***Bus service***

This study is not specifically about bus service but we asked some questions about how people see the service because walking and transit are connected and because we knew bus service is so important to our participants. Bus service has been increased in the neighbourhood since the workshop. We do not know if improvements have made a noticeable difference.

Bus service is clearly a major concern for participants with the bus being a usual mode of travel for most people both for going to work or school and for shopping. Only 3 participants (10%) recorded that they don't regularly use the bus. Most - 72 percent - reported that they use the bus at least 3 times a week including 17 percent that reported they use the bus more than 10 times a week.

Participants did report that buses were generally clean and in good working order and that drivers were generally polite and helpful. However at the time of the workshop, almost half (47%) of participants reported that bus service is a major barrier they face in their daily travel.

### *Frequency of service and on-schedule arrival*

In general, people were very unhappy with the service. The vast majority (84%) agreed or agreed strongly that the bus did not come frequently enough and many (43%) agreed or agreed strongly that the bus doesn't come when it should. More than half also agreed or agreed strongly that the bus is too slow and that it is often too crowded.

These complaints were mirrored in the small group discussions where the frequency of service, especially for the number 54 bus, was mentioned in all five groups along with the problem of buses coming in bunches and then not coming for a long time. As one participant noted about the 54, "It's the pits!"



### *Crowding*

Crowding was also frequently noted with people complaining that buses often go by without stopping because they are already full. This seems to be especially the case when the schools let out and students use them, presumably to get home. As an example of crowding, one respondent noted her daughter had to wait forty minutes to get on a bus when she had her stroller because there was not enough room.

### *Bus stops and shelters*

The stops and shelters were also a source of complaint, with participants noting there are not shelters for winter protection and that winter snow piles at bus stop making it very difficult to get into the bus, especially for seniors and people with strollers. Lack of seating at bus stops was also mentioned as a problem for elderly people and some participants complained that garbage cans at bus stops are not emptied frequently enough and are often overflowing and filthy.

### *Desire for more direct routes*

Many participants expressed the desire for bus routes that went directly to some common destinations rather than having to transfer between buses. Scarborough Towncentre was mentioned several times as a place to which people wanted direct service as was the Rouge Valley Centenary Hospital, the closest hospital to the neighbourhood. There is currently bus service to Kennedy subway station from Morningside, but some participants also wished for direct service on Lawrence so they do not need to change again from the Scarborough RT line. Making transfers is a special concern for some elderly participants. One participant with a walker mentioned that they can't take the bus if it requires a transfer because the "can't take the risk" of being caught away from home not knowing when the next bus is coming.

### ***Pedestrian and general neighbourhood environment***

Both the survey and small group exercise brought out how people evaluate their general walking environment. Only 10 percent of respondent reported that they did not face any major barriers to their daily travel in the neighbourhood. The most frequent listed barriers in the survey that relate to walking included poor sidewalks and walking conditions (mentioned by 33 % of participants), people not feeling safe, (mentioned by 20%), traffic (mentioned by 17 %), and the places people want to go being very far apart (mentioned by 13 % of participants).

### *Snow clearance*

These issues were often flushed out in the small group exercise. Sidewalk conditions, especially poor snow clearance, were mentioned in all groups as an important issue. Participants mentioned that sidewalks are not cleared quickly or well enough, that snow is often left on the sidewalk where it turns to ice and becomes dangerous. Also, snow that gets dumped on corners making barriers for pedestrians to climb over was identified as an important issue. The city has identified this as a pedestrian issue in some areas of the city, but it is not clear whether this neighbourhood is receiving attention in this regard. Galloway and Lawrence was identified as an example where this is a problem.

In the surveys, almost a quarter of the participants identified themselves as finding walking physically difficult and snow clearly makes these issues harder. The elderly, people who require scooters and pregnant women were all mentioned as having an especially difficult time getting around in the snow. One participant simply said that "people are very isolated here in the winter."

### *General sidewalk conditions and curb cuts*

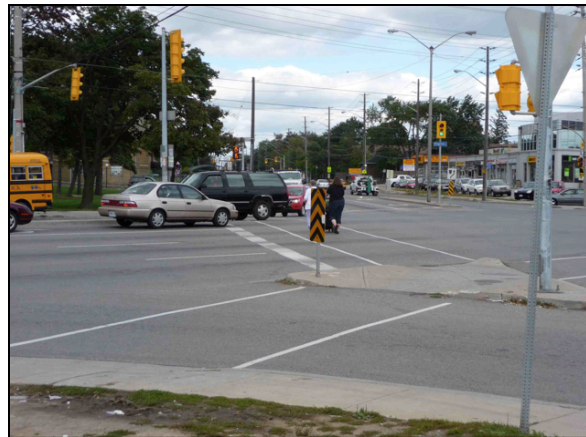
Participants also commented on more general sidewalk conditions. The lack of curb cuts for use by the elderly, people on scooters and other people with impaired

mobility was mentioned as a general problem. As one participant put it, “It’s hard to walk in a lot of places in this community. Mostly the curbs are too hard to get over.” The redeveloped Morningside Mall was mentioned as a particular place where sidewalks were poorly linked and curb cuts are missing.

### *Street crossing – the Triangle and Lawrence*

An initial inspection of the individual mapping exercise shows that people mostly rely on the large arterial streets, especially Lawrence, to walk to the places they need to go in the neighbourhood. In the survey participants did not identify the pedestrian network as poorly connected but in the small group exercise walking along and crossing Lawrence did come up as an issue. In particular, several participants brought up the busy crossings at Lawrence and Kingston as a problem. The early green for cars at this signal is seen as creating a conflict with pedestrians and the crossing signal was also identified as being too short for seniors to get across. One participant said they avoid going there as a pedestrian and only go by car.

Other places identified as risky crossings were by the medical centre at 4125 Lawrence and at Heron Park. Both were seen as places many people walk across Lawrence with fast moving traffic. The medical centre does not have a formal, protected crossing and Heron Park only has a crossing guard during the week.



### *Traffic, bicycles, and other sidewalk issues*

Traffic seems to be a more general issue with 25 percent of participants marking on their survey that traffic is an important safety concern. Even walking down Lawrence was sometimes seen as uncomfortable, with walking across the ravine bridge being brought up in particular.

Another issue brought up by one participant was crowding on the sidewalks because of the diverse mixture of users including people on bicycles, skateboards, and scooters, and people with strollers and dogs. The participant observed “I’ve been run down before... it’s safer to walk on the road.”

It is unclear what sore a problem bicycles on sidewalks present for pedestrians. Even the youth who participated in the workshop mostly did not report that they regularly bicycle although this may not be representative of use in the neighbourhood as a whole. Still, in the survey only 10 percent mentioned the lack of

bicycle lanes in the area as a problem. An important benefit of bicycle lanes in suburban settings, however, is that they help move bicycles off the sidewalks.

### *Security and lighting*

Feeling safe when one is out walking is clearly an important concern for creating good pedestrian environments. In the group discussions some people seemed hesitant to talk about this issue, perhaps not wanting outsiders to get a wrong impression of their neighbourhood. One person even said that the media's negative portrayals of the area are part of what make people feel unsafe.

It is clear from the survey, however, that at least for some people personal security is an issue. Twenty percent of participants marked that not feeling safe is "a major barrier to their daily travel in the neighbourhood," and, in another question asking, "If you feel unsafe walking in certain parts of your neighbourhood, what are some of the reasons why?," only 10 percent of participants marked "Not applicable, I pretty much feel safe"

Several factors were listed for participants to identify what makes them feel unsafe and some of these were not related to personal security including poor traffic as discussed above. Still, 50% of participants marked "scary people," 32% marked "Places with trees, bushes, or buildings where I can't see who is there", 18% marked "Too few people around," and 18% also marked "Places with fences and narrow spaces where I feel nervous."

Some comments in the group discussion mirrored these responses. A number of participants in several groups mentioned that they do not feel safe at night and that drug dealing was a problem. Others mentioned that they avoided certain streets and routes because of safety concerns.

In the survey 29% marked "poor lighting" as a security concern and the need for increased lighting was also commonly mentioned in the group discussions. Particular locations streets mentioned that some people felt were too dark included Military Trail, Orton Park, Galloway. Locations mentioned included behind some of the schools and in park areas and, also, in the triangle area where "even the street lights don't work" and it is very dark walking at night.

### ***Public spaces***

Other than the streets and shopping areas, parks and schools constitute the neighbourhood's main public spaces. Some parks and school areas were identified as scary places, especially at night but it was the parks, by far, that received the most comments in the group discussions. Most comments were very positive. Morningside, Cedar Brook, Heron, Thomson, and the Park at St. Margret's Church all received very positive comments.

### *Morningside Park*

Morningside received the most comments and showed up on participant's individual maps, too, as an important asset to the community and well loved. Several people mentioned the calm they felt there or how going there was like taking a journey completely outside of Toronto.

Although some participant's mentioned they wouldn't go into the park on their own, most people want better access to it. Access by car from Morningside Road was seen as good, but people in several groups identified lack of access from Lawrence and other areas. While there are "lots of little pathways people have made over the years" on either side of the Lawrence bridge, they are seen as unsuitable for many people. Other existing trails (such as by the Scout Camp) were also identified as too steep for people on scooters or even older people on foot. One group discussed wanting much better access from the west side of the park north of the East Scarborough Storefront. One suggestion was to connect an existing trail through the Scarborough Golf Club Road. One participant complained that the park is really only easily accessible to people with cars.

### *Comments on other parks and schools*

The need for more benches in the shade was mentioned as a general issue in parks. The park by St. Margaret's was identified as not being accessible to people who cannot walk and also as having no facilities for children or seating. Peter Secor was also identified as lacking children's facilities. Orton Park was identified as having poor lighting.

### *Other community spaces*

Several participants mentioned the loss of the large community space at the old Morningside Mall as a major blow to the community. As one participant put it, "now there is nowhere with a stage and facilities to have a big community gathering – that's an important thing." In the group discussion with youth, the need for a place for youth to hang out at night such as a well-lighted basketball court or park was also mentioned.

On the positive side, several people mentioned the role the East Scarborough Storefront plays in bringing the community together. The community garden was also mentioned and some people think there should be more of them. The Community Market Festival at St. Margaret's with its fresh food and entertainment was also seen as very important.

## **SUMMARY OF THEMES**

The information presented above does not fully describe all the comments we heard, all the information collected in the survey, or include a systematic compilation of the notes made on the maps. This work will continue.

However, even the preliminary reporting of information from the workshop brings up some clear themes. First, the participants represent a population that is highly dependent on walking and transit to carry out their daily lives. Most shop by foot and bus within the neighbourhood and many also walk or take the bus locally for work and school. Bus service, especially the number 54 bus, is almost universally seen as being very poor, with not enough buses, unreliable service, and crowding.

The walking environment is also an issue for many people. A theme that came out particularly strongly was severe problems with snow on sidewalks and snow banks people must climb to get across streets or use the bus. With Toronto's long winters, this is clearly a major issue for people who have any difficulty walking but must rely to fulfil basic needs.

Another major issue was crossing Lawrence and the Lawrence-Kingston Road triangle area where many people walk to do their shopping. Conflicts between cars and pedestrians, insufficient crossing times, poor sidewalk conditions, and poor lighting with broken street lights all came out as issues.

Some people clearly did not feel safe moving about the neighbourhood, partly due to exposure to traffic, but also because of security concerns. Some concerns were related to physical design or insufficient lighting in some areas. People did not want to overplay it, but "scary people" and places that were isolated without many people came out as issues for many people. Some participants avoided certain areas or tried to avoid going out when it was dark.

Finally, people mourned the demise of the community meeting space at the old Morningside Mall but talked very positively about other community meeting spaces. Morningside Park, in particular, is seen as a very important community asset but one that needs much better access from the neighbourhood.