

CO-DESIGN NOW!

A Resource for Design Activism

COMMON
SPACE
COALITION

PROJECT SUMMARY

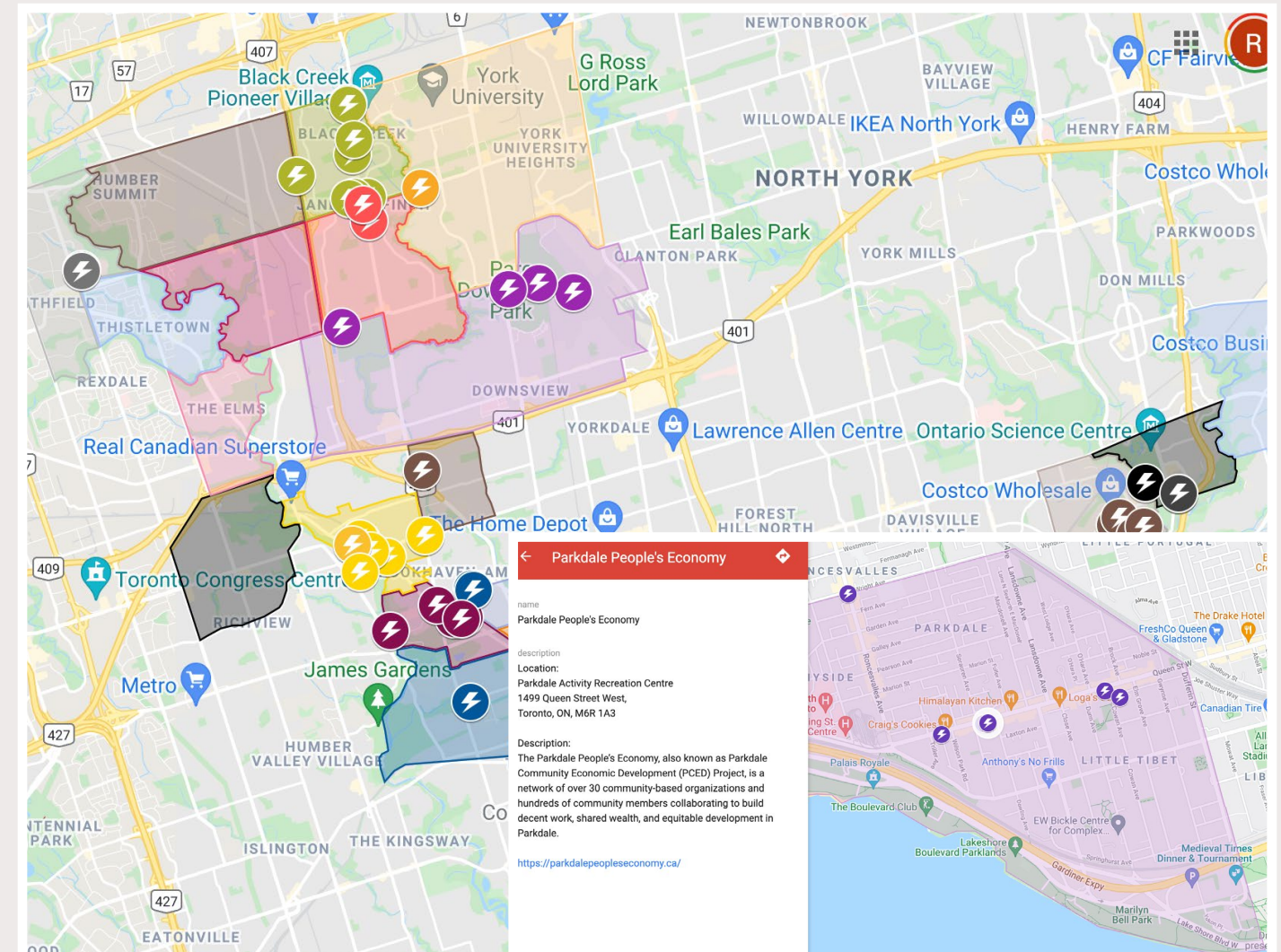
Co-Design Now is a two-part project that provides a point of departure and case study for participatory landscape architecture.

The project aims to address the systemic processes in private landscape architecture practice that limit the lack of diverse voices contributing to the design and discussion of the urban environment. Traditionally, the main goal of public consultations for private developments is to inform the community about a proposed development and solicit feedback on architectural design and form. Further, the traditional site inventory and analysis process only account for physical and policy conditions.

Part one of our project established a free, accessible online resource for landscape architects, titled **Co-Design Now!**, which catalogs grassroots organizations whose work is adjacent to landscape architecture. This map aims to provide landscape architects with a jumping-off point to better connect with the communities they wish to serve where their projects occur.

Part two of the project focused on building collaborative relationships directly with community groups, exploring how these relationships could manifest. For this case study, we partnered with Parkdale People's Economy (PPE) – a group of over 30 community-based organizations and hundreds of community members collaborating to build decent work, shared wealth, and equitable development in Parkdale, one of Toronto's most rapidly-gentrifying neighbourhoods.

Over the course of a year, we joined the PPE's Planning Committee with 17 other diverse community members to collaborate and participate in a community planning process that would inform their annual reports and published studies. A pivotal stage in our co-design process focused on community mapping. Together with the PPE, we held four online community mapping workshops using Social Pinpoint – an easy-to-use online interactive mapping tool gaining traction in city planning projects in the United States and abroad. These workshops created a space for productive engagement, sharing experiences and stories, and allowing space for feedback.



Screenshot of the **Co-Design Now! Map**

Find your neighbourhood and click the thunderbolt icon to get to know the local agencies in the area. ⚡

Unlike regular consultations for private developments and design processes, our goal with these community mapping workshops was to cultivate a sense of community governance. We focused on identifying shared visions and values for community health and wealth, collecting personal stories and qualitative information related to landscape architecture's spheres of influence in a project. Rather than focus on aesthetic design, we aimed to cultivate visions and values for community health and wealth. We prioritized understanding people's experiences of belonging and well-being in the neighbourhood through a mapping and storytelling process. The impacts of development and displacement were also critical themes.

Significant themes that arose, and that landscape architects influence both directly and indirectly in our work, were:

- People's memories and feelings are tied to the existing placemaking of the neighbourhood.
- That residents are grappling with the change in their physical environments and the loneliness that comes with that change.
- A significant question is hanging over their heads: where is their place in the future Parkdale?

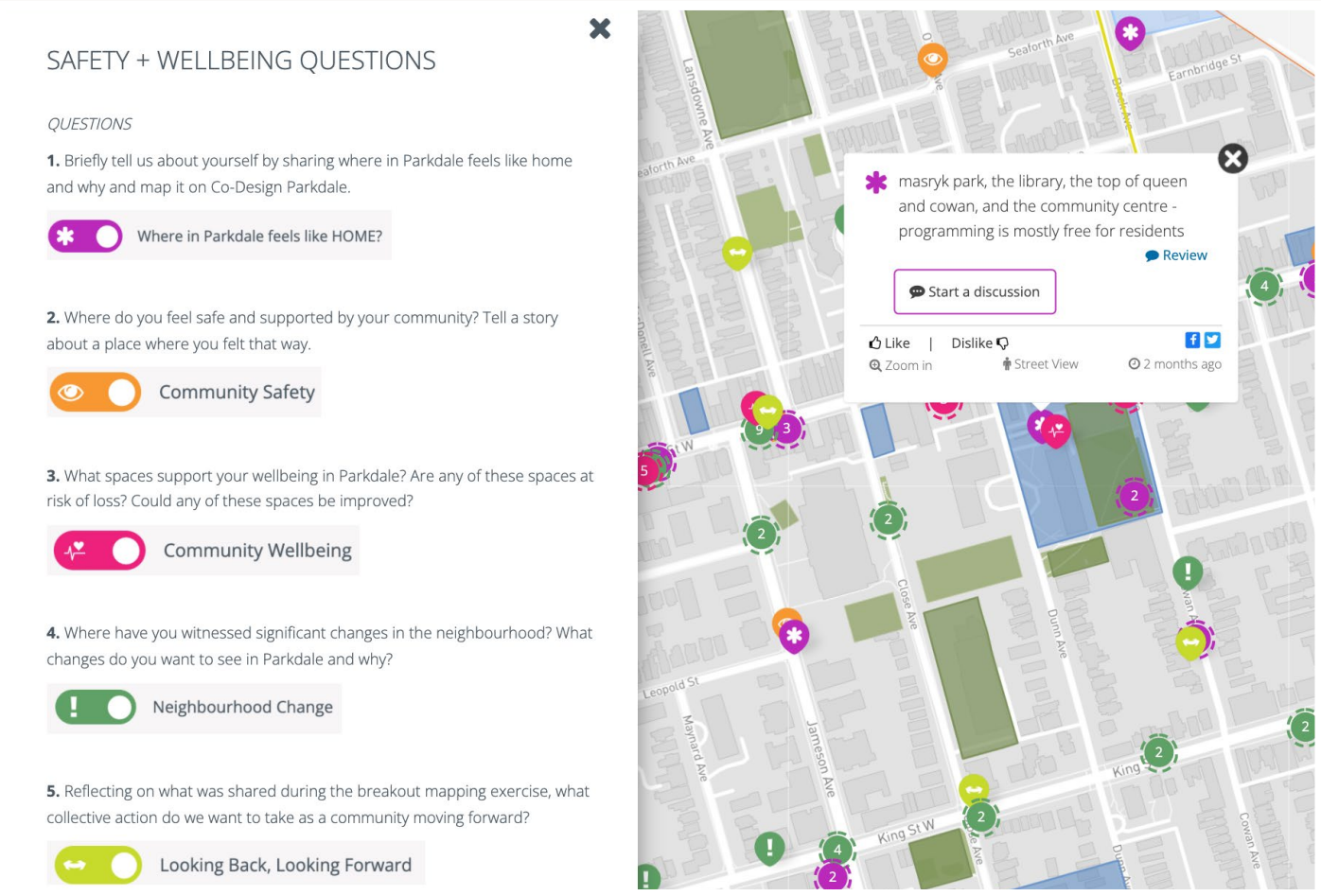
The rich, personal, and beautiful information gathered from the workshops can be viewed in the **full report** and on our **website**.

Looking Ahead as Designers

As designers, we do not merely create physical objects or spaces. Instead, our work reflects the political and social zeitgeist of our time within the contexts of culture, local references, and narratives. By incorporating community-driven design into our work, we have an opportunity to define our design priorities for the better.

Expanding the proposed scope of work in fee proposals for private development projects should include consulting community leaders, activists, and designers to unearth layers of history, culture, and values throughout the design process, especially in the beginning. Through a participatory approach, landscape architects can have the opportunity to set a precedent for future generations of designers and raise the bar for accountable and inclusive Canadian landscape design.

Finally, as we look for a path towards equitable design and practice, we hope that this project will encourage landscape architects to examine *how* we engage with communities that we might not belong to but whose physical environments we shape. Further, we hope this project demonstrates that stories, local knowledge, personal histories, and lived experiences are critical elements of the site inventory and analysis phase that cannot be overlooked.



Screenshot from Social Pinpoint illustrating people's comments on the maps. Questions on the left facilitated during the 'Safety and Wellbeing' workshops.

Thank you to LACF, our partners at Parkdale People's Economy, and the residents that shared their time, experience, and stories with us.

We are grateful to be working on this land, and for the opportunity to do this work.

- Common Space Coalition

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