




Shift 2025

Reshaping Communities Challenge

The images on the cover, and throughout this publication, have been submitted by this year's teams for the SHIFT2025 Challenge, *Reshaping Communities*.

The information in this book comes from the SHIFT submissions as well as conversations between the author and the team members. Any opinions expressed are not necessarily shared by the OAA or its Council.






OAA SHIFT2025

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President's Message

ONTARIO ASSOCIATION OF ARCHITECTS

Communities are inherently dynamic, shaped over time by evolving climates, social shifts, and technological advancements. With this constant change comes an urgent requirement for adaptability—to design structures and spaces that not only endure but also help empower people to thrive in uncertain times.

The Ontario Association of Architects (OAA) regulates the practice of architecture in our province to protect the public interest. One of the OAA's awards programs is the biennial SHIFT Challenge, which is an aspirational ideas competition that showcases how the architecture profession can offer innovative approaches to important societal issues.

For this year's theme, *Reshaping Communities*, we invited OAA members and their collaborators to explore sustainable environments that balance stability and flexibility, endurance and the potential for transformation.

The lasting effects of climate change have altered the way we live. The architecture profession has immense potential to respond with solutions that create opportunities for growth, belonging, and hope. The many SHIFT2025 submissions received by the OAA this year embraced this challenge, offering bold ideas that reimagine urban spaces, address emergency resilience, and redefine inclusivity in the built environment.

From urban revitalization proposals that tackle density and affordability to novel design paths that address climate-related challenges, the six selected projects celebrated in these pages illustrate the ingenuity and resourcefulness of Ontario's architectural community.

Chosen by our jury (about whom you can learn more on page 46), these submissions underline the profession's capacity to reimagine communities with technical expertise, as well as compassion and foresight. Each project demonstrates how architectural thinking intersects with human experience to propose solutions for a better, more resilient future.

On behalf of the Ontario Association of Architects, I extend my deepest thanks and congratulations to all who contributed their visionary ideas to this year's SHIFT Challenge.

I invite you to explore the varied concepts within this book, which I hope will inspire your imagination in seeing how architectural ideas—and the interdisciplinary teams behind them—can serve as powerful agents of change that can reshape communities and improve lives for future generations.

Ted Wilson
Architect, OAA
President

SHIFT2025: Reshaping Communities

INTRODUCTION

As the ancient Greek philosopher Heraclitus once wrote, “Change is the only constant.” Our lives and communities, along with the natural world, are in a continual state of flux. Small changes can happen over short periods, as our favourite neighbourhood landmarks come and go. And over the years, massive changes transpire, such as the global community’s wholesale transition to the digital age. The repercussions on the field of design, as well as on our own backyards, are significant. With each period of change, sooner or later we collectively feel the need to change our surroundings to fit.

Where once the world’s leaders, planners, and architects aspired for permanence, we now aspire for something with far more longevity: adaptability. The capacity to reshape our surroundings and our lives has acquired a new urgency as the world’s political economy shifts and slides beneath our feet.

The cataclysmic effects of climate change, the internet, a global pandemic, and other forces are demanding a change in our approach to neighbourhood-building. Communities must adapt to the new reality that a single-family home is no longer an option for most urban families. Households themselves are continually transforming, reconfigured by changing demographics and the demise of the job-for-life, house-for-life model of yesteryear, which had always been unavailable or unsuitable for many people in any case. We must continue to find new modes of housing that encourage healthy living and vibrant social interaction. At the same time, we can look at how our existing resources and building stock can be reconfigured for changing needs. After decades of postwar demolitions of older buildings, many communities are now realizing the embodied value of our built heritage.

Unexpected phenomena like the pandemic compelled a fast-track rethink of our interior spaces: we recognize that it is not always safe to live and work so physically close together—and yet the loneliness of physical isolation presents a conflicting challenge. Rising construction prices once prompted a replacement of costly building materials with cheaper options, such as synthetic-fibre upholstery and vinyl window frames. And now we find that these lower-cost replacement materials are generating toxins in our environments. How, then, can we reshape our communities in ways that address changing priorities but don’t create new problems?

As history has repeatedly shown, designers with new ideas can contribute significantly to adapting and reshaping our communities during periods of great change. The enduring human need for healthy air, easy access to food and other essentials, meaningful social connections, and proximity to nature remain as trenchant as ever—but the way we fashion our built landscape to deliver these needs is always in need of adjustment. The projects laid out in the following pages offer a wealth of ideas for reshaping our communities in response to our changing world. We invite you now to be inspired by them.

ewg3D/iStockimages

Subdivillage:
A Remaking of the Subdivision

NAAMA BLONDER, MISHA BEREZNYAK, PERFECTO VILLALBA, YVONNE YE, VISHAKHA TIWARI

Subdivisions have evolved in the past few decades, with larger houses built on narrower lots, and more cars per household. Yet the basic articulation of their overly wide streets and house siting has remained the same, failing to adjust to the changing housing forms. As a result, the typical subdivision has become more congested, with less green space and often an unpleasant environment for pedestrians. The wide streets encourage fast driving and make the neighbourhood look desolate. *Subdivillage* takes a different approach: maintaining the same density, while restructuring the street network to support walking, cycling, and local connections. Using land and infrastructure more efficiently, this approach improves the quality of streets for car and pedestrian traffic, without adding costs. The *Subdivillage* concept adapts to community growth, ensuring that walking and biking—along with the use of strollers,

An example of the *Subdivillage*'s Mews Street concept.

JURY'S COMMENT:

"This project embodies the core principles of exceptional urban planning, seamlessly integrating a livable, walkable, green, and people-friendly design that elevates every aspect of urban life. It reimagines the co-existence of people and cars in a visually appealing, human-centred, and sustainable way."

wheelchairs, and other assistive devices—remain safe and viable for short trips, even in car-dependent areas. It also ensures that future transit or increased density can be accommodated without major disruption to the neighbourhood.

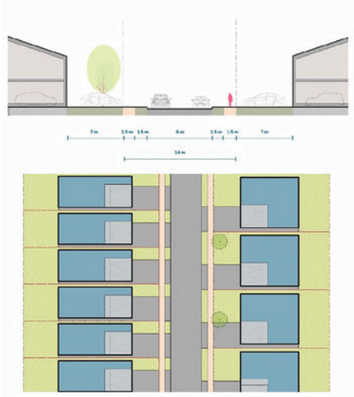
Imagine that you are visiting friends at the edge of a medium-sized city like Sudbury. You arrive at night to a large, detached home with a two-car garage—the kind of place many Canadians choose to move. When you step into their home, you appreciate the positive qualities a typical suburban subdivision: space, tranquility, safety, a backyard, and garden. The next morning, you go for a walk. The sidewalk is uninterrupted, the street feels calm and welcoming, and walking is unexpectedly enjoyable. Here in the *Subdivillage*, children play in the street and bike to school, safely and confidently, thanks to the three main kinds of routes offered by the *Subdivillage* concept: the Mews Street, Through Street, and Green Street.

The Mews Street is a compact roadway with a shared space that serves both pedestrians and vehicles at walking speed. Car access is allowed for locals only; through-traffic is prohibited. There are no driveways cutting through the sidewalks, resulting in a pedestrian-friendly, human-scaled place.

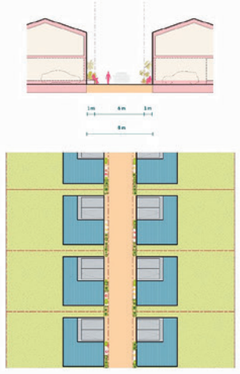
The Through Street concept.

The Green Street concept.

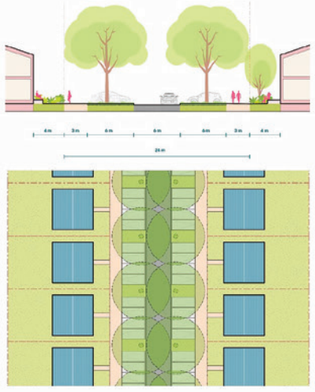
This SHIFT proposal takes the standard subdivision residential street and created three street types that are used for different locations and needs. The three types differ based on their location—but each of them does a better job at accommodating pedestrians, cyclists, and, where needed, cars.



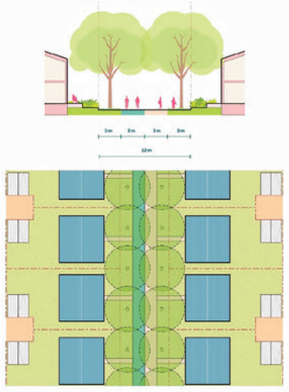
1. Mews Streets
This type is used for local streets that can be designed to disallow through-traffic.



2. Through Streets
This type is used for streets that need to accommodate through-traffic, and also to provide visitor parking.



3. Green Streets
These streets only have access for pedestrians, cyclists, and emergency and service vehicles.



The Through Street accommodates through-traffic and visitor parking. In place of the usual roadway-sidewalk-front yard with setback, there is perpendicular parking accessed directly from the street. There are no garages or driveways fronting the street.

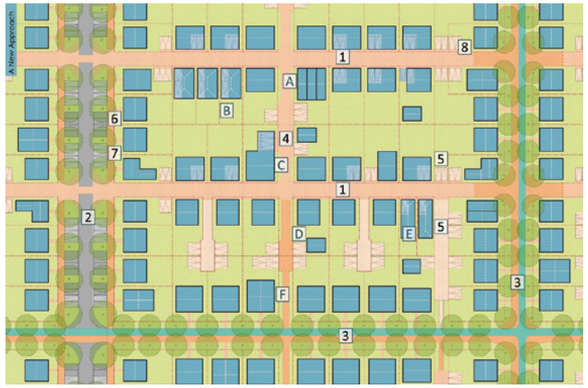
The Green Street offers direct and dedicated walking routes on quiet green streets closed to car traffic, except for occasional and well-marked car crossings. These streets are numerous and provide the best option for pedestrian and cycling trips. The homes that line these streets overlook the pedestrian and bike traffic, adding to public safety. If and when a public transit system becomes viable within the neighbourhood, it can be accommodated on a select number of extra-wide Green Streets earmarked for this future function. Public transit users will be spared the unpleasant walk-and-wait on an arterial street, and buses will not be slowed down by driving in mixed traffic.

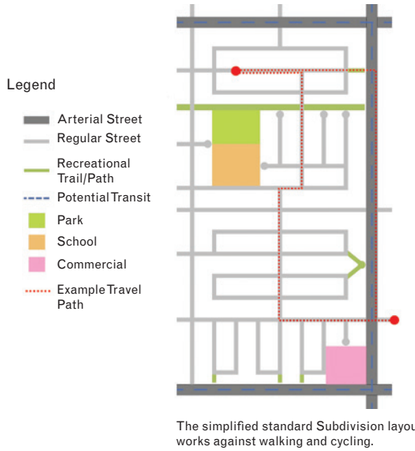
By transforming the urban layout in this way, the *Subdivillage* concept enriches the community with safer and more pleasant streets, greener surroundings, more useable front yards, human-scaled places, and a setting that is more conducive to form neighbourly connections.

Demonstration Site Plan

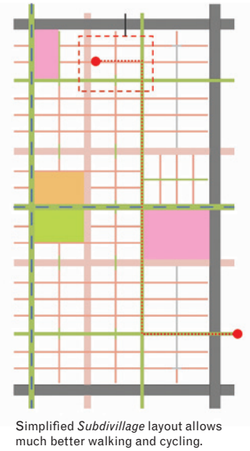
1. Mews Streets
2. Through Streets
3. Green Streets
4. Mid-block connections
5. Parking for properties fronting the Green Streets
6. Private parking
7. Public parking
8. Retractable bollards allow emergency and service vehicles to pass.

A. Townhouses
B. Narrower lots with tandem gargages
C. Triplex
D. Garden suite
E. Narrower lots with single-car garages
F. Semi-detached houses





The simplified standard Subdivision layout works against walking and cycling.



Simplified *Subdivillage* layout allows much better walking and cycling.

The City Limits:

Rethinking a 100-year-old Toronto Suburb

TIMOTHY SCOTT, GEOFF SCOTT

This proposal is based on the premise that we will all need to live in a wider range of communal buildings located in recognizable neighbourhoods, connected to the rest of the city by streets designed to accommodate all users.

In our society at the present time, we have many collective obligations. We must work together to reduce overall carbon emissions while creating civil, human-scaled places. To achieve this, change must happen at all stages and scales, from the selection of construction materials, to the design of the buildings, streets, and public spaces that create our neighbourhoods, to the necessary paradigm shift away from the current infrastructure of our car-dependant cities

The City Limits is a proposal for change in residential building design, block configuration, and street design on an existing 100-year-old

A neighbourhood can densify while preserving its architectural character.

residential neighbourhood. The case-study neighbourhood is comprised of 70 blocks located on a stretch of Yonge Street in North Toronto. The proposed transformation has three main objectives. First, to quadruple the number of residential units without substantially changing the form or physical character of the original neighbourhood. Second, to return the existing streets and lanes to the communal spaces of the neighbourhood. And third, to demonstrate strategies for designing buildings with carbon net zero emissions.

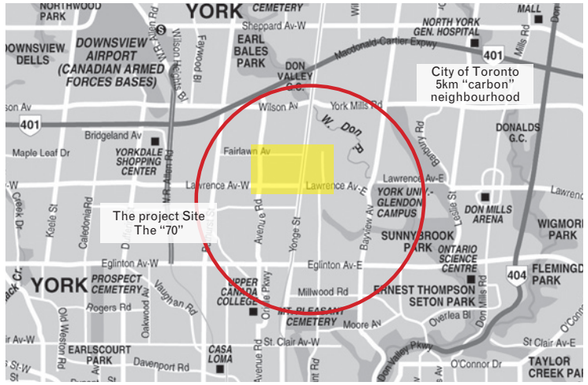
Careful material selection, including cross-laminated timber, will aid in reducing carbon emissions by storing carbon during its lifespan and replacing energy-intensive materials like concrete and steel.

The best context for a hopeful future is one where climate change is acknowledged as the core design issue for all buildings. *The City Limits* offers an approach for a hopeful future, and imagines a place where we would truly like to live.

These objectives can be achieved by the careful introduction of three- and four-plexes to replace the existing single houses on the existing lots. The addition of laneway houses further increases the residential density. The removal of car parking from the front yards of the new three- and four-plexes and the adjacent streets will now allow for designated

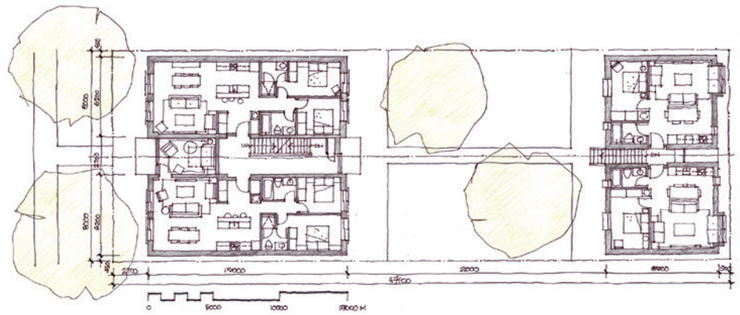
Study Block – Incremental Infill (148 units – incl 26 ex)

1. New 3-4 Plexes; 2. Laneway/Garden Suites; 3. Reno/Additions to add units to Existing;
4. Residential over commercial/retail; 5. Exisiting Single-Family Houses

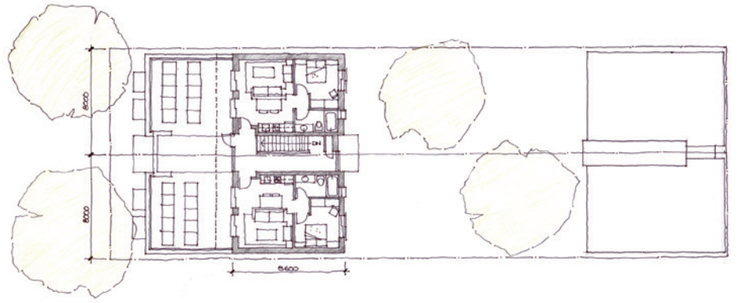


Street/Laneway Unit Plans for singles and doubles.

Ground floor single.



Second, third floor double.



Fourth floor double.

cycling lanes, improved sidewalk conditions, and an enhanced streetscape of planting and street trees.

The new multiplexes honour the scale of the existing single-family houses. The location of the buildings allows for ground floor terraces and substantial boulevard planting, while optimizing the landscaped rear "yard" so characteristic of the original blocks. Brick cladding is selected for a long service life and to reinforce the historic continuity of Toronto's residential housing.

The street-facing terraces and upper balconies recall the role of the front porches of the original houses in providing "eyes on the street" offering security for people of all ages strolling or playing on the sidewalks. More homes will increase vibrancy within the neighbourhood, supporting walkability, ensuring safe cycling, and reducing car traffic.

JURY'S COMMENTS:

"Under this concept, each neighbourhood block becomes a development office, equipped with developing its own agency to develop a wise masterplan. This concept is rooted in relationships and organizing. Look at your block, look at your neighbours, and work together to make it special."

Swansea Park

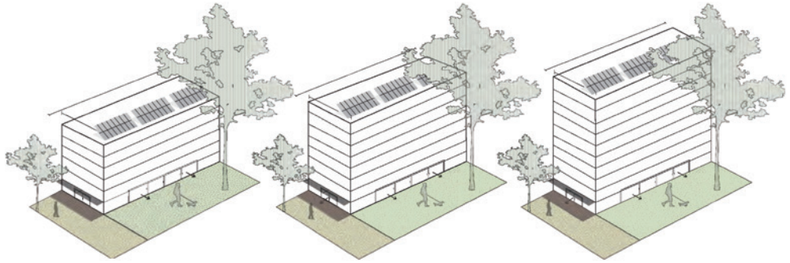
A Development Concept for the Former Swansea Mews

DAVID PETERSON, AVERY PETERSON, EUNICE LEUNG

Swansea Park is a development concept for the Toronto Community Housing site of Swansea Mews located in High Park–Swansea, a west-end neighbourhood in Toronto. The existing Swansea Mews is a housing complex with 154 public housing units that was marked for demolition in 2022, due to its unsafe structure following a structural failure that resulted in injury and relocation of all tenants.

The proposal seeks a balance between social, ecological, and functional concerns by knitting together natural and urban systems. The City of Toronto has designated much of Swansea as an Environmentally Significant Area, including spaces immediately to the northwest of the proposed development. The site is also in close proximity to significant wetlands.

To prioritize nature in the urban context, the design begins with a central naturalized park that

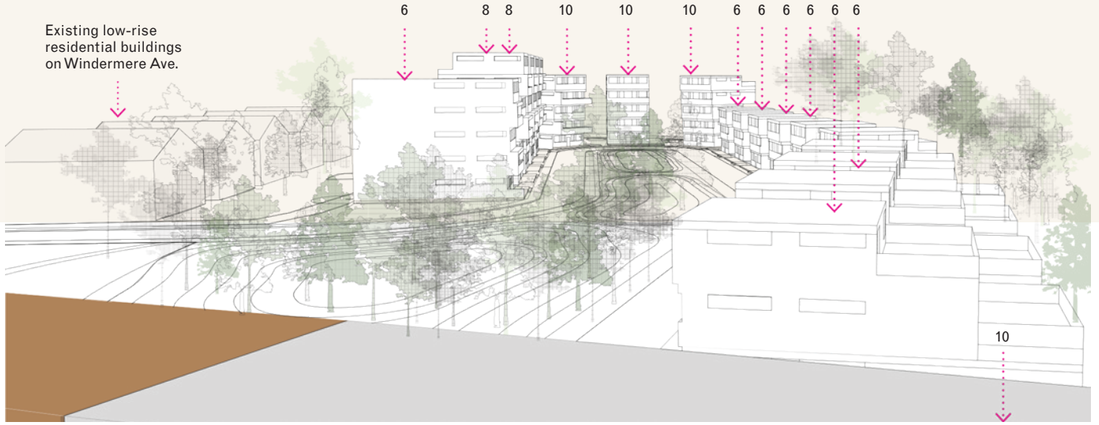


6 Storeys 8 Storeys 10 Storeys

creates wildlife habitat and promotes biodiversity. The park provides an ecological and social basis for the adjacent mid-rise housing blocks that surround it in a crescent shape. A multi-use public porch is the threshold to the park located along The Queensway, the aerial street that serves the site. The vibrant social life of the west-end neighbourhoods will find a new public space in Swansea Park for recreational activities and special events.

The proposal advocates for the retention of trees on site. Preserving these trees, many of them old-growth, is crucial for the High Park-Swansea natural habitat, and helps retains the character of the residential neighbourhood.

A vision for Swansea Park.



JURY'S COMMENTS:

"Beyond illustrating the importance of public housing and outdoor green spaces, there are so many layers here to appreciate embedded in the framework—an understanding of ecology, the need for vibrant social life, and the presentation of a significant process that empowers individuals and neighbourhood communities to build."

New plantings of tall native trees in the central landscape provide an increased level of privacy for residential blocks looking toward the centre of the site. The plantings also act as a sound barrier against traffic noise from the Queensway.

The proposal calls for a deconstruction strategy as part of the demolition phase. This will allow for the reclamation of construction materials, which can be re-used in the new housing development. Existing brick and concrete can be reclaimed, reducing the amount of construction waste.

Nature and urban life are a comfortable pairing already seen in the Swansea neighbourhood. The proposal follows this example while increasing the density of the site and providing more than double the number of units. The density is achieved with modular mid-rise buildings that can be factory-built, offering tremendous cost efficiency. In doing so, we could start a trend where innovation in housing sees the creation of celebrated public building projects.

Proposed isometric site plan.

The proposed winter market.

Swansea Park streets in winter and summer.

Parkdale Commons:
A Living Food Bank

LUC JOHNSTON, NANCY CHAO

Parkdale Commons: A Living Food Bank transforms Toronto's Parkdale Community Food Bank (PCFB) into an adaptive space, fostering resilience, food security, and sustainable connections through thoughtful architecture.

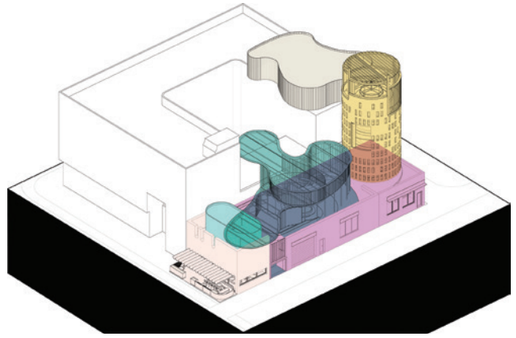
In the heart of Toronto's Parkdale neighbourhood, a pivotal moment emerged when the PCFB secured its permanent home at 5 Brock Avenue. This milestone marked the end of an era defined by operational fragmentation and displacement due to rising rents and expanding community needs. Now anchored in their own space, PCFB stands at a transformative threshold. The *Parkdale Commons* project envisions this building as a catalyst for community resilience. The project addresses the Food Bank's immediate operational needs while anticipating the evolving needs of Parkdale's diverse community. In this

Essential to community well-being, this SHIFT proposal introduces vital public amenities that address a critical gap in Parkdale's infrastructure.

way, the project transforms a simple building acquisition into an opportunity for lasting social impact through thoughtful architectural intervention.

This proposal explores further how proposed work on the PCFB building could facilitate the creation of infrastructure to strengthen community bonds and simultaneously assure food security. Each architectural intervention is conceived not just as a space, but as a tool for community empowerment and sustainable food access, including in times of crisis. During emergencies, natural disasters, political turmoil, and times of general crisis, people in communities rally together in order to support one another. This proposal expands the transitional role of a conventional food bank building, creating an ecosystem of food production, community support, and social enterprise.

The project introduces vital public amenities to address a critical gap in Parkdale's infrastructure. This design incorporates both washrooms and shower facilities, signaling

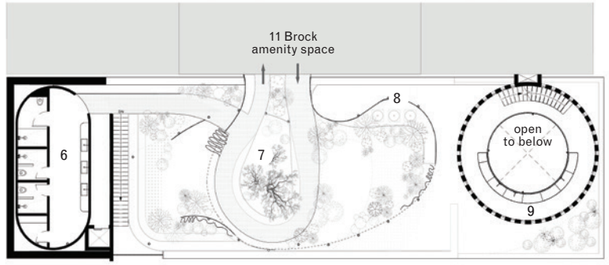


Legend

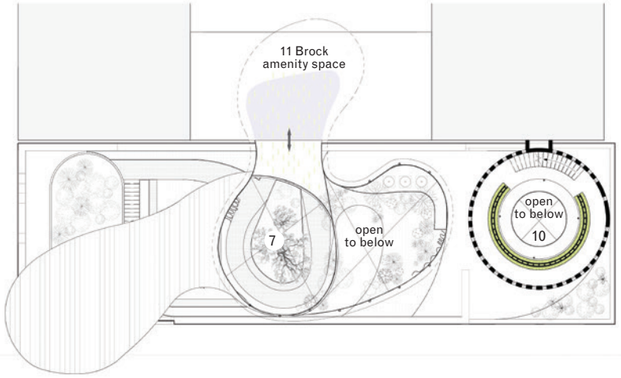
1 Restaurant
2 Volunteer breakroom
3 Walk-in fridge/freezer
4 Warehouse racking
5 PCFB storefront
6 Community washrooms
7 Conservatory
8 Rooftop units
9 Fruit/veg washing and sorting area
10 Hydroponic growing area

Ground floor plan.

Second floor plan.



Third floor plan.



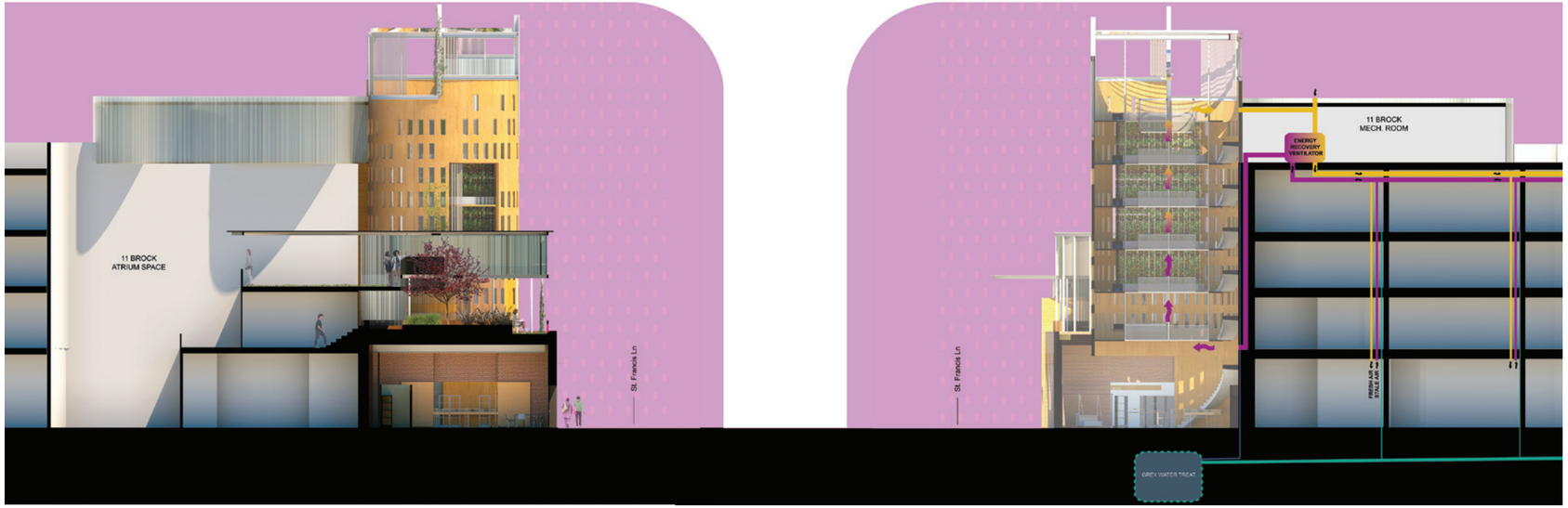
JURY'S COMMENTS:

"Thoughtfully employs an adaptive reuse approach for a permanent hub in a place that needs one. By integrating community-facing programs with support spaces, and elevating food banks to culinary experiences, it could serve as a catalyst for a community restart while creating real connections."

a commitment to human dignity to the most vulnerable residents who often lack access to basic hygiene facilities. The restaurant space brings the opportunity for culinary innovation and social impact into this underserved neighbourhood. The space offers a rotating platform for Toronto's emerging and aspiring chefs who lack the capital for traditional restaurant ventures, fostering community engagement in the process. The conservatory is a light-filled pavilion that provides shelter for hundreds of homeless or underhoused community members.

At the heart of the design is an on-site food production area. The system bypasses global supply chains while aligning with PCFB's emphasis on dignity of choice, in a structure built with cross-laminated timber.

Despite challenges from economic instability, climate emergencies, and global conflicts, PCFB continues to adapt and respond to community needs with remarkable resilience. In keeping with Parkdale's collaborative spirit, this building grows, adapts, and responds to its diverse community's evolving needs.



At the heart of the design is an innovative response to food security: on-site food production.

The Living Core:
Designing for Resiliency at Home

FRANCES MARTIN-DIGIUSSEPPE, DAVID DIGIUSSEPPE, CAMERON MCKAY, MELISSA FAVAS, PETER FROST, JASON SAMPSON, JESSICA LUK, MAITE PERIS, MARCELO GRACA, PAULO GERONIMO

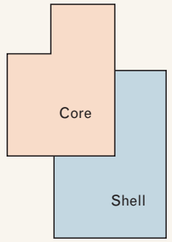
The Living Core proposes a re-imagination of the traditional built form of Ontario homes, suggesting a change that can be simple and yet radical. In its most basic iteration, this conceptual design offers protection, safety, and resiliency from tornadoes or similar natural disasters, all of which are becoming more frequent with climate change. Designing a "living core" within the house offers its occupants a space that will act as a fortified boundary within the structure, thereby creating a safer house.

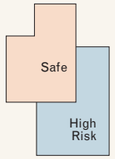
The Living Core focuses on Goderich, a small Ontario town, as a case study for devising single and multi-family housing that allows community members to rebuild rather than relocate in the event of a natural disaster.

This Core is unobtrusive under normal living conditions, but acts as a secure refuge when needed. The rest of the home, the "Shell," provides additional

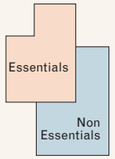
By analysing the effects of the 2011 tornado on the town of Goderich, architects can gain insights on how to design more resilient buildings and communities.

Disaster Resilent Housing
The Core concept establishes the Core as a fortified safe house, offering secure refuge from extreme weather events such as tornadoes, wildfires, and hurricanes, while the Shell provides additional living space that can be easily replaced if damaged.

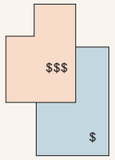




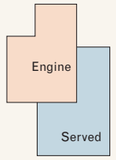
Safety
The Core offers a secure refuge within the home, providing residents with a safe space during extreme weather events.



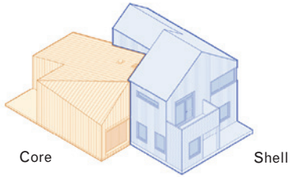
Essentials
All essential living spaces are housed within the Core, while the Shell provides additional living and bedroom areas, serving as a luxury rather than a necessity. All vital functions of a home can operate independently of the Shell.



Cost-Effective Security
All high-cost areas of the home, including the kitchen, laundry, and bathroom, are incorporated within the Core, helping to reduce the overall cost of rebuilding the Shell.



Engine of the Home
With all mechanical utilities housed and protected within the Core, it functions as the central engine, powering and servicing both the Shell and the rest of the house.



Single-Detached House Model
Goderich's housing stock is predominantly made up of single-detached homes, with three-bedroom configurations accounting for the largest share of the town's residences.

living space that can be easily and more affordably replaced. Essential areas, including expensive and hard-to-replace spaces like the kitchen, laundry, bathrooms, and mechanical services are housed within the Core, ensuring vital functions can operate independently of the Shell. This duality in design reduces rebuilding costs, helps insurability, prioritizes safety, and creates flexible, livable spaces that adapt to unpredictable situations.

The project is designed for three stages: pre-disaster, during a disaster, and post-disaster. The Core is designed for adaptability, meeting the evolving needs of a family in any situation. The multi-purpose room can function as a workshop or home business space, but is designed to be transformable into a shelter for a car.

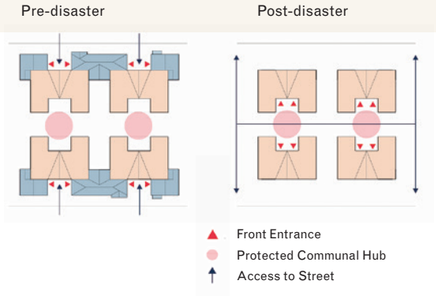
During the occurrence of the natural disaster, the house occupants can adjust certain walls and

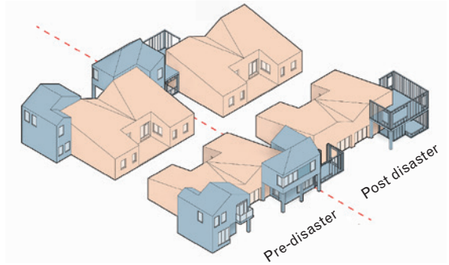
furnishing as they move into the safe area of the Core. Foldaway desks and dining tables will generate much-needed space for their temporary inhabitation of the Core. Cars can be protected by opening a moveable accordion wall and bringing the car into the Core space. The storm-shutter windows and steel shelter doors will be closed and secured.

Post-disaster, *The Living Core* can provide a compact temporary home, making use of the adaptable feature. The Core's ground-floor living room area features a Murphy bed that can be pulled down to transform the room into the primary sleeping spaces. A second sleep space can be created on the second floor by folding away the mezzanine desk and pulling out a trundle bed from the wall. Extra Murphy beds in the multi-purpose room will provide shelter for additional family members or neighbours in need of refuge.

This project emphasizes social responsibility, protecting the economic and cultural fabric of towns. Building resilient housing in the first place can help preserve the structural integrity and usefulness of houses, preventing the wholesale abandonment and decline of neighbourhoods that can follow in the wake of natural disasters. *The Living Core* is replicable and designed to blend seamlessly into various architectural styles, making it a viable solution for established and cherished communities.

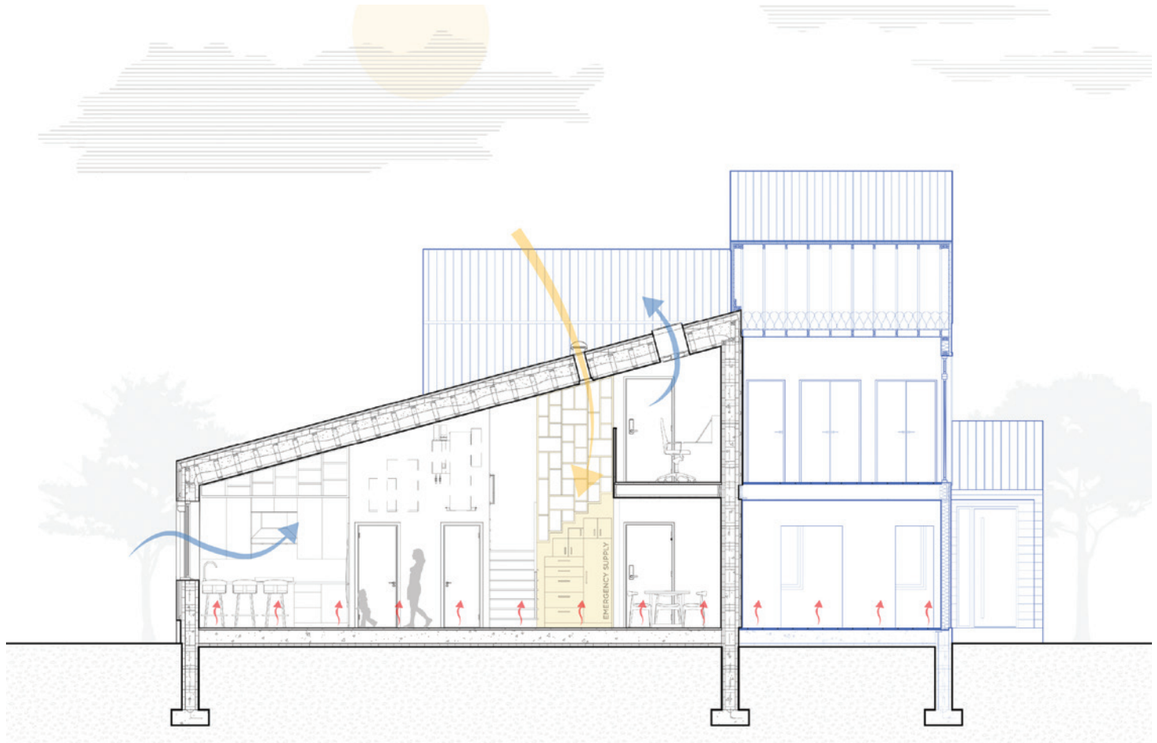
Townhouse Block Configuration
The Shell and Core design concept in the townhomes give rise to a vibrant community hub, where social interaction, connection, and a sense of community naturally flourish among residents. This design would have the potential to foster community bonds, enabling residents to support one another during times of crisis or disaster.





JURY'S COMMENTS:

"A great example of how the built environment can offer resilience, it provides the security of a bunker without looking like a bunker. The knowledge that your home's core will remain intact in the face of fire, floods, and winds offers peace of mind for not only safety, but also protection for your most valuable, sentimental items. Your home would still feel like a home."



Speculative Assemblies:
From Pine Needles to Pressed Coffee

JERRY HACKER, MADISON BOLYEA, MIKHALA GIBSON, THEO JEMTRUD, DYLAN JOZKOW, JEREMIE LAFLECHE, MU QU JENNIFER LIU, SIMON MARTIGNAGO, KEEGAN METHERINGHAM, EMMA MONFETTE, DAPHNE STAMS, VINCENT TOURANGEAU

If we wish to create a post-carbon, post-plastic, non-toxic future, now is the time for a significant change in the way we design and build. *Speculative Assemblies* imagines a regenerative resource revolution, with building assemblies free of the noxious materials, methods, and global distribution networks that are causing widespread damage to human and planetary health.

The international supply-chain system that supports the construction industry requires extensive shipping and generates carbon emissions, often benefiting corporations at the expense of marginalized communities and the environment. *Speculative Assemblies* wants to change this through its core principles. Buildings and assemblies can and should come apart readily to enhance

Wall Assembly
R-29.04 lime plaster finish
(stabilized) burlap
4" straw insulation burlap
10mm grass batt insulation burlap
2"x4" studs at 2' O.C.
4" straw insulation burlap

Roof Assembly
R-17.25 wood shingles
13mm plywood sheathing
150mm straw insulation
2"x6" deep rafter at 2'O.C.
1"x2" batten at 2' O.C.
50mm plywood finish

"Brrrrrlap."

"Cattails."

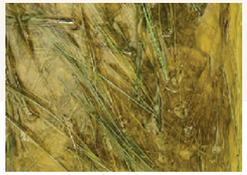
JURY'S COMMENT:

"If whole-building life cycle assessment takes a deep dive into the extraction, manufacturing, construction, deconstruction, and recycling of materials while maintaining a low-carbon footprint, then this project embodies that approach seamlessly."

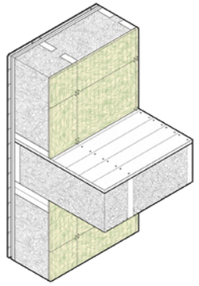
end-of-use possibilities. All toxic ingredients and materials are eliminated or avoided. At the end of their use, buildings and assemblies should be capable of returning to the earth, resulting in wholly regenerative cycles.

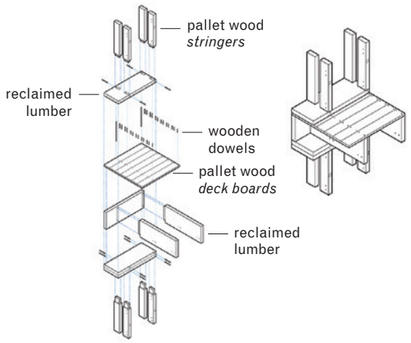
This research project is based on three core principles for a new approach to design and construction. First, we can design buildings in a way that allows disassembly and biodegradation. Second, we can aspire to make buildings plastic and toxin free. And third, we can build with locally based regenerative resources that return themselves to the earth, thereby rejuvenating environments and enhancing human health and regional biodiversity.

For communities, cities, and architects, the question is urgent, because the planet is literally and figuratively on fire. Across Canada, wildfires are burning land at a record pace, caused by dangerously high temperature changes from pre-industrial levels. Meanwhile, synthetic materials are invading our surroundings and our bodies. In the last 75 years, global plastic production increased from 2 million to 450 million tonnes, with the construction industry the

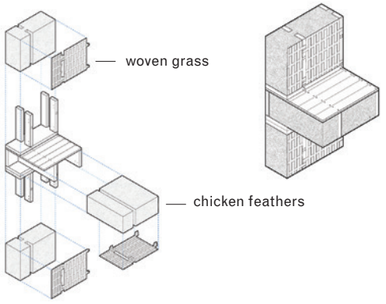


"Pine & Feather."

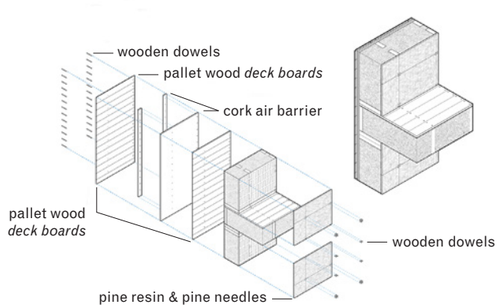




"Bees & Bioplastic."



"Straw Time."



On these pages are explorations of the use of natural materials to construct building materials and compomnents. Clockwise from top left: log off-cuts, ground coffee pressed into "bricks," fallen maples leaves, cob, rammed earth, and discarded corn husks.

second largest user of plastics. Derived from the byproducts of petrochemicals, plastics create toxic levels of exposures, from extraction to their eventual disposal. Plastics do not degrade, resulting in an emerging profusion of micro-plastics, which has made its way into our bloodstreams and has even been found in tumours and the placentas of newborn babies.

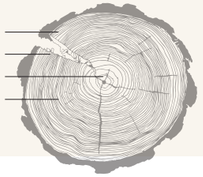
The 11 projects that comprise *Speculative Assemblies* are case studies in how natural and discarded materials that would ordinarily end up in the landfill can be used to create sustainable, non-toxic construction materials. Lumber offcuts, pine resin, feathers, straw, corn byproducts, burlap, beeswax, discarded fabric, dead leaves, and coffee grounds are just some of the materials that can be processed and transformed into cellulose, membrane panels, bricks, insulation, cladding, and many other building materials. *Speculative Assemblies* proposes building systems that contain these transformed materials and offer a new approach to construction.

The hope is simple but not for the faint of heart: *Speculative Assemblies* proposes a resource revolution, to free ourselves from the materials, methods, and supply chains that are wreaking havoc on our health.

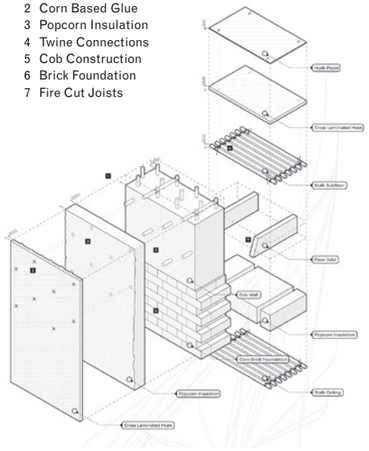
"Tree House."

"Coffee Break with Convention."

"Maple Leafs."



"A Bit Corny."



"Ram it Up."

"Big Thick Cob."

JURY OBSERVATIONS

The submitted projects effectively address this year's SHIFT Challenge theme of *Reshaping Communities* through a variety of scales, from complete reimagining of cities and subdivisions to the individual makeup of building components. The difference in scale seen across the submissions emphasizes the importance of thinking holistically when reimagining our communities. This approach aims to create sustainable, connected, and cohesive environments that actively adapt to ongoing changes in our social, economic, and environmental conditions. The proposals demonstrate how the definition of "community" is diverse and nuanced, yet it can be successfully reshaped regardless of its interpretation through strategies that ultimately strengthen connections and improve our well-being.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, given the *Reshaping Communities* theme, housing emerged as a recurring element of concern for this year's SHIFT Challenge. Numerous projects explore sustainable building techniques and innovative methods to increase urban density by empowering communities. Some reimagine housing systems using alternate, recycled, or repurposed materials. Others focus on housing solutions in unconventional locations. While some projects address housing in subtle ways, they all effectively highlight the direct and indirect impacts of the built environment on people's homes and daily lives.

Photos by Andrew Grinton

Several submissions propose a reimagining of the traditional subdivision model, while others focus on community living and aging. By modifying zoning bylaws, promoting more shared outdoor and green spaces, and improving our understanding of ecology and social interactions, these reimagined community models respond to contemporary lifestyle changes, sustainability needs, and intergenerational living. The models aim to create resilient and environmentally sustainable communities that are better suited to a changing climate, while also addressing concerns related to an aging population and social isolation.

Housing is central to the climate change conversation, representing both a personal refuge and a critical element of resilience against unpredictable environmental events. While increasing density alone is not a sufficient solution, building sustainably and adaptively is imperative. The 37 submissions reviewed by the jurors explored this challenge from multiple scales—ranging from citywide planning strategies to the selection of biogenic materials.

The OAA's SHIFT2025 Challenge, *Reshaping Communities*, highlights a necessary rethinking of our built environment, showcasing innovative projects that embrace sustainability, inclusivity, and long-term resilience.

JURY MEMBERS

Janet Rosenberg is the founding principal of Janet Rosenberg & Studio Inc. A Fellow of both the Canadian and American Society of Landscape Architects, she has led the design and implementation of public and private landscapes across Canada, including the Rock Garden at the Royal Botanical Gardens, Market Square in Guelph, HTO Park in Toronto, and Kiwekì Point in Ottawa. Among her awards are the Governor General of Canada Confederation Medal, Canadian Urban Institute's Urban Leadership Award, and the Canadian Society of Landscape Architects' Lifetime Achievement Award.

Dr. Elizabeth English is professor of architecture at the University of Waterloo. She is the founder and director of the Buoyant Foundation Project, a not-for-profit research organization that works on the development of amphibious foundation systems as a low-cost, low-impact flood mitigation and climate adaptation strategy that supports the preservation of traditional housing forms and respects local cultural practices. Her education, practice, teaching, and research are interdisciplinary, with degrees in architecture from Princeton and Penn, and in civil engineering from MIT.

Shane Laptiste, is a Toronto-based Architect and founder of the Studio of Contemporary Architecture (SOCA). As a principal of SOCA and a recipient of the 2023 Canadian Prix de Rome, he explores how communal narratives and spatial imaginaries can translate into built form, especially within Black communities. He currently leads projects supporting art, gathering, and joy in marginalized communities across Canada. Shane holds a Bachelor of Science (Architecture) and a Master's of Architecture degree from McGill University.

Erica Gomirato is an Intern Architect at Perry + Perry Architects in Sudbury. She graduated with her master's degree in architecture from Laurentian University's McEwen School of Architecture in 2023 and created one of the five selected projects for the OAA's SHIFT Challenge in the same year with her submission, *Healthy Cities: Sustainable Adapting the Dominion Foundry Complex*. Erica hopes to encourage other designers and professionals in related fields to embrace sustainable design in Northern Ontario through her internship in Sudbury.

Jean Philippe Larocque, is the director of design and co-founder of LEA Architects. After gaining valuable experience in Ottawa and Toronto, he established LEA Architects with Architect Ruth Elder in North Bay in 1995. A LEED Accredited Professional, he has cultivated a diverse portfolio of significant projects, including the Canadian Ecology Centre, Collège Boréal's main campus, and the Anishinabek Nation Administration Building. Jean Philippe chairs the North Bay Society of Architects (NBSA) and serves as a representative on the North Bay Municipal Heritage Committee.

Diarmuid Nash

JURY FACILITATOR

Diarmuid Nash, Architect, OAA, is a partner at Moriyama Teshima Architects. Diarmuid's various leadership roles include President of the Ontario Association of Architects, Chair of the Royal Architectural Institute of Canada, and Chancellor of the RAIC College of Fellows. He teaches in the Master of Architecture program at the University of Toronto's John H. Daniels Faculty of Architecture. Nash has played a leading role in many projects, including the City of Surrey's City Hall and Civic Plaza, the Edmonton Federal Building's Centennial Plaza, and the Government of Canada Visitor Welcome Centre on Parliament Hill in Ottawa.

Inset: Janet Rosenberg. Left to right: Dr. Elizabeth English, Shane Laptiste, Diarmuid Nash, Erica Gomirato, and Jean Philippe Larocque.

Photos by Andrew Grinton

PROJECT TEAMS

Subdivillage

NAAMA BLONDER, MISHA BEREZNYAK,
PERFECTO VILLALBA, YVONNE YE, VISHAKHA TIWARI

Photo by Brand Me Photography

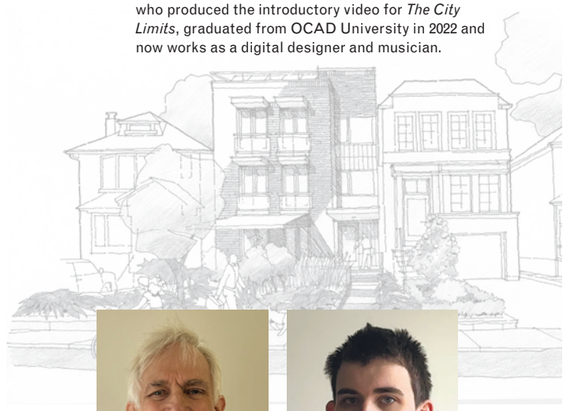
The Smart Density Team

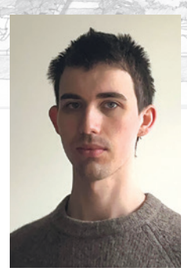
The *Subdivillage* project team is drawn from the principals and staff of Smart Density Inc., a Toronto-based studio founded by architect/urban planner **Naama Blonder** and architect/urban designer **Misha Bereznyak**. Architectural designer **Perfecto Villalba**, urban planner **Yvonne Ye**, and graphic designer **Vishakha Tiwari** worked with Blonder and Bereznyak on the winning project. Smart Density champions complete communities fuelled by higher-density living, walkable neighbourhoods, and a beautiful public realm. Smart Density's broad portfolio ranges from small infills to master plans. Smart Density was recognized in all three previous SHIFT Challenges (2019, 2021, and 2023) and was awarded the OAA's Best Emerging Practice in 2022.

The City Limits

TIM SCOTT, GEOFF SCOTT

Team leader **Tim Scott** was a founding partner of Natale and Scott Architects, the director of the Architectural Studio at FORREC Limited, and a principal of FORREC Architects Limited. His resume includes custom country houses, non-profit social housing, masterplans of large international entertainment projects, and mixed-use developments. Tim Scott has taught at the University of Toronto and University of Waterloo Schools of Architecture. After stepping down from formal practise in 2022, he has been devoting more time to research projects, including the current SHIFT project. His son and research partner **Geoff Scott**, who produced the introductory video for *The City Limits*, graduated from OCAD University in 2022 and now works as a digital designer and musician.





Swansea Park

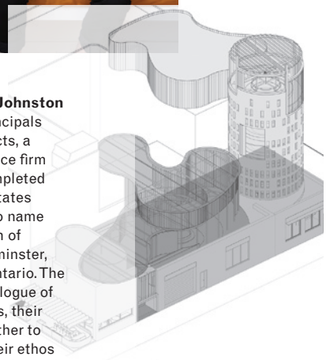
DAVID PETERSON, AVERY PETERSON,
EUNICE LEUNG, RIVER DOG

Team leader **David Anand Peterson** is founder and principal of David Peterson Architects. His team has executed a wide roster of projects, including single-family and multi-unit residential, as well as offices, interiors, and housing research. Born in Georgetown, Guyana, Peterson immigrated to Canada as a child and later studied at Sheridan College, Carleton University, and the University of Toronto, where he received his professional architecture degree. The firm's work adheres to Peterson's ethos that architectural craft and beauty should serve people and urban ecological environment they inhabit. The *Swansea Park* team is rounded out by architectural technologist **Avery Peterson**, designer **Eunice Leung**, and wellness-support provider **River Dog**.

Clockwise from left: Avery Peterson, Eunice Leung, David Peterson, River Dog

Parkdale Commons

NANCY CHAO, LUC JOHNSTON



Nancy Chao and **Luc Johnston** are co-founders and principals of LloydLondon Architects, a Toronto-based full-service firm with a wide range of completed projects in the United States and Canada. Their studio name derives from a conflation of their hometowns: Lloydminster, Alberta, and London, Ontario. The name represents the dialogue of their collected memories, their experience coming together to create new ones, and their ethos of merging the humble and grand aspirations of original design. The studio has more than 25 years of experience working in both the United States and Canada on a wide range of projects, including residences, cultural institutions, restaurants, offices, and wellness spaces.

PROJECT TEAMS

The Living Core

Top row: FRANCES MARTIN-DIGIUSEPPE,
DAVID DIGIUSEPPE, CAMERON MCKAY,
MELISSA FAVAS, PETER FROST
Bottom row: JASON SAMPSON, JESSICA LUK,
MAITE PERIS, MARCELO GRACA, PAULO GERONIMO

The Living Core project is led by **David DiGiuseppe**, an associate architect at Q4 Architects (Q4A). Founded by **Frances Martin-DiGiuseppe**, Q4A has studios in Toronto, Calgary, and Ottawa. Its portfolio of built work includes residential, institutional, commercial and community-focused buildings for clients across North America. The Q4A team's projects range from large-scale but human-centric master plans to compact one-off projects. The firm's research and design focus on ways to make communities that are walkable, transit-oriented, and comfortably diverse.

Speculative Assemblies

Top row: DAPHNE STAMS, DYLAN JOZKOW,
MIKHALA GIBSON, SIMON MARTIGNAGO
Centre row: MADISON BOLYEA,
KEEGAN METHERINGHAM, MU QU JENNIFER LIU,
JEREMIE LAFLECHE
Bottom row: EMMA MONFETTE, THEO JEMTRUD,
VINCENT TOURANGEAU, JERRY HACKER

The *Speculative Assemblies* team is led by **Jerry Hacker**, founder of hACT (hacker architecture collaboration technique) and an assistant professor of architecture at the Azrieli School of Architecture & Urbanism at Carleton University. Hacker's research collective, hARC (hereto advancing regenerative causes) convened for SHIFT2025 to address the perils of current building construction methods and investigate the regenerative options for the material and assembly culture of cold-weather climates.

The hARC collective also explores other regenerative causes such as fostering sociality and combatting chronic loneliness. The collective works in a reciprocal dialogue with hACT's professional practice as a kind of "soul" for its body of work.

Shift 2025