

# GROWTH AND RESILIENCY IN TOWER IN THE PARK SITES ACROSS THE GGH

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

**The majority of post-war towers in the Greater Golden Horseshoe are in need of renewal - but most are located outside of areas targeted for growth and redevelopment.**

Post-war towers in the GGH are isolated and in need of renewal to create connected and complete communities, enhance the quality of life for those living there and meet climate change goals. However, **most of these sites exist outside of identified growth areas that have been established by provincial plans like the Growth Plan.** This has limited the abilities of municipalities and building owners to attract or consider reinvestment.

**Furthermore, a lack of policy and guidelines around redeveloping tower sites has compounded the challenges facing these buildings and surrounding areas.**

- Growth and transformation on Tower Sites is consistent with many city and provincial initiatives, yet contradictory to existing zoning making Tower infill projects a complex, uncertain and timely process.
- Official Plan policies related to "Apartment Neighbourhoods" can be helpful for many aspects of Tower Renewal but most exist outside of identified growth areas.
- Existing built form guidelines – whether for townhomes, mid-rise or tall buildings – are often difficult to implement in Apartment Neighbourhoods, creating a lack of clarity for acceptable built form in these areas.
- Mechanisms for ensuring broader neighbourhood improvements within apartment neighbourhoods such as public realm enhancements, amenities, upgrades to existing buildings are yet to be defined. -



Image Courtesy of Google Earth

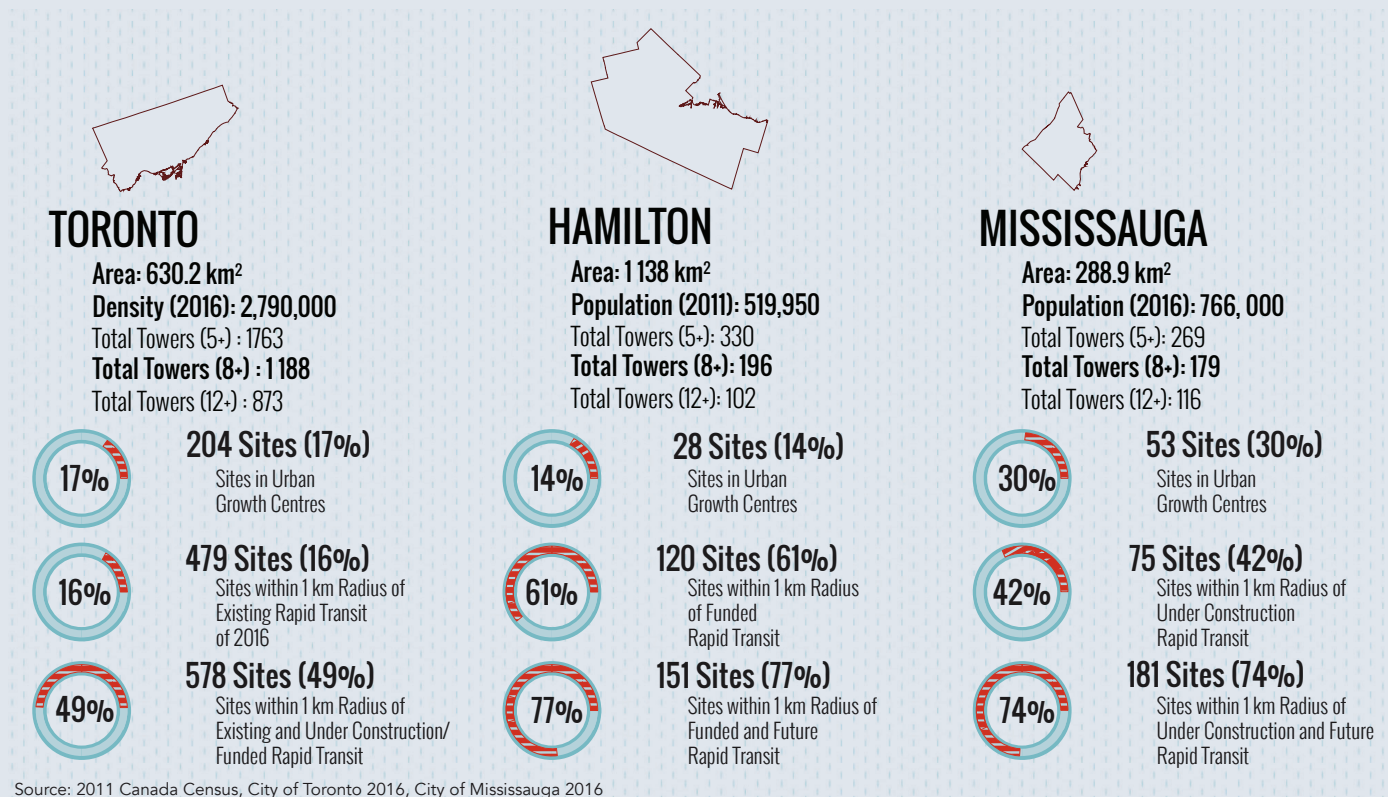
## NEW OPPORTUNITIES

Infill development on post-war Tower sites can contribute to meeting key provincial goals including achieving more complete communities, mitigating climate change through building retrofits and low carbon growth, improve housing quality while maintaining affordability.

*Growth and Resiliency in Tower in the Park Sites Across the GGH*, a research report developed by the Centre for Urban Growth and Renewal in partnership with the University of Toronto found that:

- 14% of Towers are within Urban Growth Centres
- 35% of Towers are within 500m of rapid transit
- 24% of Towers are within 500m of a major transit station area

While the majority of these tower sites are outside of urban growth centres, an increasing number are next to newly opened, under-construction and planned transit, creating the potential to establish transit-supportive densities near transit. This has changed the planning context and the investment viability for many of these sites.



## DISTRIBUTION OF APARTMENT TOWERS WITHIN ONTARIO'S LARGEST MUNICIPALITIES

## NEW TYPOLOGIES

The findings of *Growth and Resiliency in Tower in the Park Sites Across the GGH* not only establish current redevelopment challenges but also suggest new guidelines for redeveloping different types of tower sites. This creates a roadmap towards establishing municipal guidelines to steer redevelopment projects in the right direction to include beneficial outcomes.

### **Most tower sites in the GGH exist within four typologies:**

#### **1. TOWERS AND ARTERIAL ROADS**

- Sites are often separated from one another and from the neighbourhood at large.
- Significant opportunity from transformative investments in rapid transit along arterial roads.
- 49% of Towers are adjacent to arterial roads (within 100 m)
- 0% of Towers are set back 250m from arterial roads

#### **2. TOWERS AND SHOPPING CENTRES**

- While co-located, towers and shopping areas are typically separated from one another by fences and roadways and rarely reflect today's goals of integrated communities
- Substantial opportunities to integrate towers and shopping areas and create complete communities – the basics are already there.
- 33% of Towers are within walking distance (500m) to Shopping Centres
  - 20% are 500m from a regional shopping centre
  - 4% are 500m from a community shopping centre
  - 12% are 500m from a neighbourhood shopping centre

#### **3. LARGE TOWER CLUSTERS**

- Clusters of towers are very ubiquitous in the GGH.
- Large clusters create conditions where towers and their grounds isolate themselves from the local urban context.
- 49% of Towers are located in clusters of 10 or more (towers within 100m of one another)
  - 23% clusters of 2 – 4
  - 18% clusters of 5 – 9
  - 10% isolated towers

#### **4. TOWERS WITHIN LOWER-RISE NEIGHBOURHOODS**

- While many towers are next to arterials, shopping centres and other urban features, the majority also interface directly with lower-rise neighbourhoods.
- Often isolated from one another by fencing and setbacks

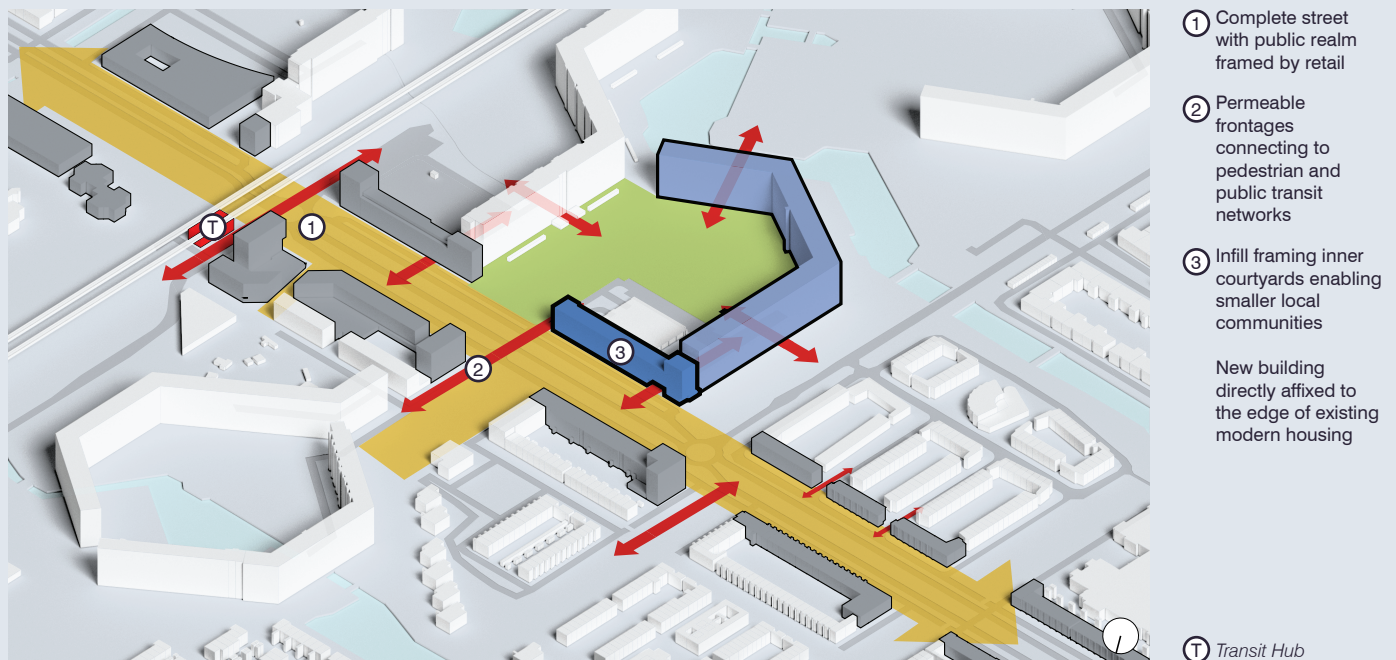
**From local analysis and a review of international case studies, this research recommends creating a values-based approach to evaluating redevelopment opportunities on all Tower sites.**

In terms of built form, a values-based approach includes linking tower sites to broader neighbourhood amenities (parks, schools, community centres, retail, transit, etc.), redesigning and enhancing open space with programming and passive uses, designing infill to define both the public frontage and site interior, introducing social and commercial amenities, linking sites to the broader public realm, enhancing existing buildings and maintaining affordability.

Using international examples of redevelopment for each typology, the report outlines a Tower Site redevelopment framework using seven key areas:

- Open space
- Pathways and connectivity
- Community Amenities
- Built form, siting and Interface
- Parking, Servicing and Site Logistics
- Building Conditions
- Community Value

## Key Interventions (Complete Community and Built Form)





Each of the four typologies require different redevelopment guidelines. Many tower sites are a blend of the typologies and will require blended guidelines.

#### 1. TOWERS AND ARTERIAL ROADS

- Improve the frontage on arterial roads integrating active transportation and transforming the road into a complete street, bound frontage with new mixed-use infill, link towers to adjacent amenities and introduce complimentary uses within site.

#### 2. TOWERS AND SHOPPING CENTRES

- Leverage mall anchor to create open pedestrian zone, link pedestrian space directly to apartments, design open space for community gathering and to support commerce and link open space to transit.

#### 3. LARGE TOWER CLUSTERS

- Link tower clusters with open space, introduce community and commercial amenities in open space and focus public activity on site interior.

#### 4. TOWERS WITHIN LOWER-RISE NEIGHBOURHOODS

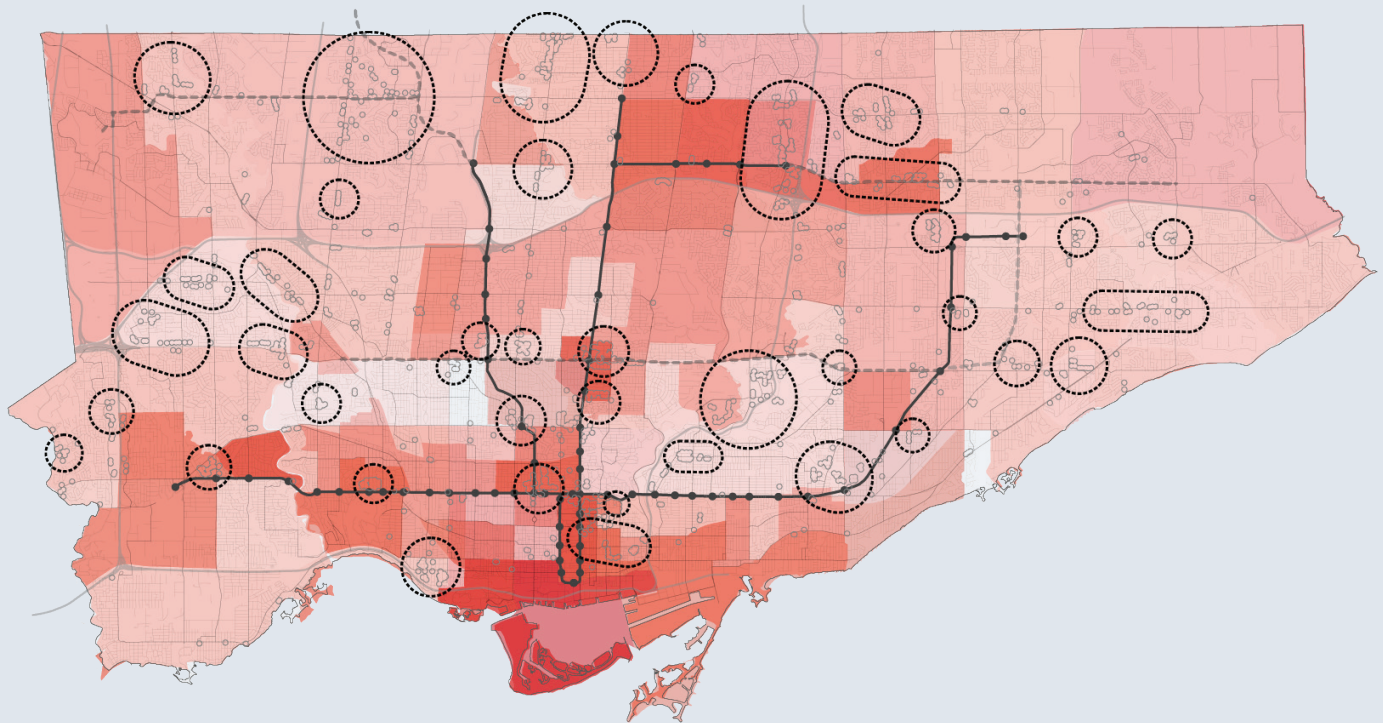
- Introduce grade-related housing fronting facing lower-rise neighbourhood, introduce interior terraced gardens and porches, connect site interior to street edge with enhanced open space and pathways and bound infill with new shared streets for pedestrians, active transportation and vehicles.

## LOCAL CHALLENGES

Local challenges and considerations also affect the redevelopment of Tower sites in the GGH. These include:

- **Fragmented sites:** Overtime towers have changed ownership, resulting in fragmentation between nearby towers and the community beyond.
- **Uneven development due to Market Zones:** Development in the GGH is concentrated in a limited number of “hot market” zones. For Tower Sites outside these areas, leveraging private development can be hard.
- **Limited Geography of Planned Growth:** 86% of Tower are located outside of planned areas of growth, coupled with weaker real estate market areas, growth and investment is suppressed.

## Apartment Towers + Market Zone Map of the City of Toronto




### Legend

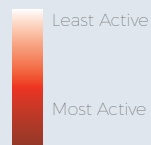
 Tower Neighbourhoods with High Social Need

 Existing Towers

 Existing Rapid Transit

 Funded Rapid Transit

### Qualitative Market Heat Map



\* Base active high rise development, townhouse sales volume and average price, and CMHC rent zones

- **Lack of clear community investment framework for Tower Sites:** What can and should be achieved on Tower Sites is currently an open question. Lack of clarity as expectations of community investment and the scale and nature of infill have made the redevelopment process difficult for planning authorities, applicants and residents.
- **Funding Full Tower Retrofit:** Refurbishing existing towers is very capital intensive and usually outside the bounds of typical redevelopment.

There is a significant opportunity to refine municipal policy to support building retrofits, site-wide renewal and achieve maximum benefits from infill projects. **Municipalities should introduce a values based approach – as opposed to metrics – to direct and evaluate physical transformation within Tower Neighbourhoods** and ensure redevelopment is guided by community input.

**To initiate change, the limitations of current planning frameworks need to be addressed. The report recommends:**

- Aligning municipal planning documents (including Ops, Secondary Plans, ASPs, MTSA Plans) with the goals of Tower Renewal
- Creating an alternative framework for tower infill by building from the values based framework developed in the report, shifting toward more values based development criteria.
- Developing location specific initiatives to achieve community benefits toward Tower Renewal goals of more complete communities
- Including Apartment Neighbourhoods, when possible, within boundaries of Mobility Hubs and Major Transit Stations
- Engaging in a Community Planning Permit (CPP) pilot to demonstrate comprehensive Tower Neighbourhood Renewal and the potential for campus wide transformation
- Engaging with provincial government to identify supportive roles in the piloting of CPPs that enable complete communities in Tower Neighbourhoods
- Exploring and enabling the use of alternative tools such as Conditional Zoning to support comprehensive Tower Renewal

**“ENABLING  
REDEVELOPMENT  
ON TOWER SITES  
IS COMPLICATED  
BY FRAGMENTED  
SITES, DIFFERENT  
MARKET ZONES, THE  
GEOGRAPHY OF PLANNED  
GROWTH, A LACK OF A  
COMMUNITY INVESTMENT  
FRAMEWORK AND  
FUNDING CHALLENGES”**

Report Prime Contributors: