

STUDENT NAMES

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Mapping Gentrification in Kensington Market: The Broader Context of the Bellevue Square Park Revitalization

Our research project centres around Bellevue Square Park, and in particular, its revitalization, which concluded in 2018. To employ cartography most effectively as a research tool, however, we have decided to investigate the neighbourhood in which the park lies: Kensington Market. The Market is a culturally complex neighbourhood with an even more complex history. It began as a Mississauga First Nations Territory and has since cycled through many identities: a Jewish Market, then a Portuguese-dominant area, and now, a neighbourhood famous for its diverse mix of artists and immigrants (St. Stephen's). Like Toronto as a whole, Kensington is not perfect. It has for decades had a reputation not just as a vibrant neighbourhood, but also an area of high drug use and crime. In recent years, however, it has begun a process of rapid gentrification, as has much of the city. Transitioning from a low-income neighbourhood to one of Toronto's biggest hotspots, we immediately thought to map opposing features within the neighbourhood that show this tension -- in particular, the pervasive upscaling of businesses, in contrast with the diverse range of social services available in the area. As will be discussed below, this shows a clear contrast between the forces of gentrification and the remaining need for socio-economic assistance for the neighbourhood's more marginalized residents. The process of gentrification is an important context for our study of the revitalization. The project included much-overdue safety upgrades in the park, such as new streetlights and a cross-cutting path. The prevalence of social services in the neighbourhood is a sign that there is still a considerable population of disadvantaged residents, even as new ones move in. The concurrence of gentrification and increased attention to the park calls into question *who* will benefit from the revitalization.

Drug use and dealing were a matter of municipal concern long before the park's revitalization. It was the site of numerous police raids and seizures of millions of dollars' worth of marijuana, ecstasy, and cocaine (Sweeping up Bellevue). Reports from crime statistics in 2012 show that Kensington Market experienced "12.71 crimes committed against a person per 1000 and 41.76 crimes against property per 1000" (Kensington Market Crime Report, 2012). As a point of comparison, there were "3.43 crimes against people per 1000 people living and working in the Yorkville neighbourhood and 22.03 crimes against property per 1000" (Yorkville Crime Report, 2012). For this reason, it should come as no surprise that there was an interest in revitalizing the neighbourhood. In fact, there had been local calls for action for years.

The Kensington Market Business Improvement Area began discussing the need for better streetlights as early as 2010 to increase visibility and thus discourage drug activity. These plans, however, never materialized. Visibility in the park was only addressed when the revitalization began in 2018 when eight new streetlights of a new design were installed.

Kensington Market has been experiencing gentrification for at least a decade, with its effects especially visible in recent years. We set out to map the extent to which gentrification has caused business turnover in recent years. To do this, we visited the neighbourhood with printed maps and Google Maps on our phones and printed maps of the area. Google's Street View feature allows the user to look back in time. With this feature, we were able to cross-reference past storefronts with current ones, and mark on the map each instance of change. We settled on the July 2012 Street View, as it was as far back in time as we could go while still having images of the entire neighbourhood. Our results were staggering. Our estimate is that around 90% of storefronts have changed hands at least once since July 2012. It must be noted that a changeover in who occupies a space does not automatically imply gentrification, but it is certainly a good indicator. For example, one change was a cannabis paraphernalia store changing to another, remarkably similar one. This is not an example of upscaling. The majority of changes, though, were quite clearly geared towards a higher income clientele. An example typical of our findings was a Portuguese wholesaler which has since turned into an artisanal microbrewery.

Changes such as this are typically not voluntary on the part of the original business. When property values increase, landlords raise rents to levels unsustainable for the original business, and they have no choice but to relocate or shut down. In their place, upscale establishments often take their place. This phenomenon was noticeable from our very first group meeting in the Market. We stopped at a coffee shop which had recently replaced a long-standing candy store and noticed that their prices were like that of Starbucks, with snacks priced at \$5 and up. Many other shops have also been converted to high-class Instagram worthy cafes and eateries. Storefronts which had previously been empty have now been filled by luxury stores. Jason Pierce, a company owner who supplies some clothing stores in Kensington said "It's becoming a Yorkville, but that's not the nature of the market. [...] The flavour and flare of the market, the diversity, is dying. [...] This is going to be the last wave. This is it" (Whyte pg. 3, 2003). It is clear why we now wish to investigate the park revitalization as potentially being another step in the process of gentrification. Safety concerns which had long existed are now only now being addressed. One possible explanation for this is the increasing social capital behind the movement to make the neighbourhood safer, as wealthy residents filter in.

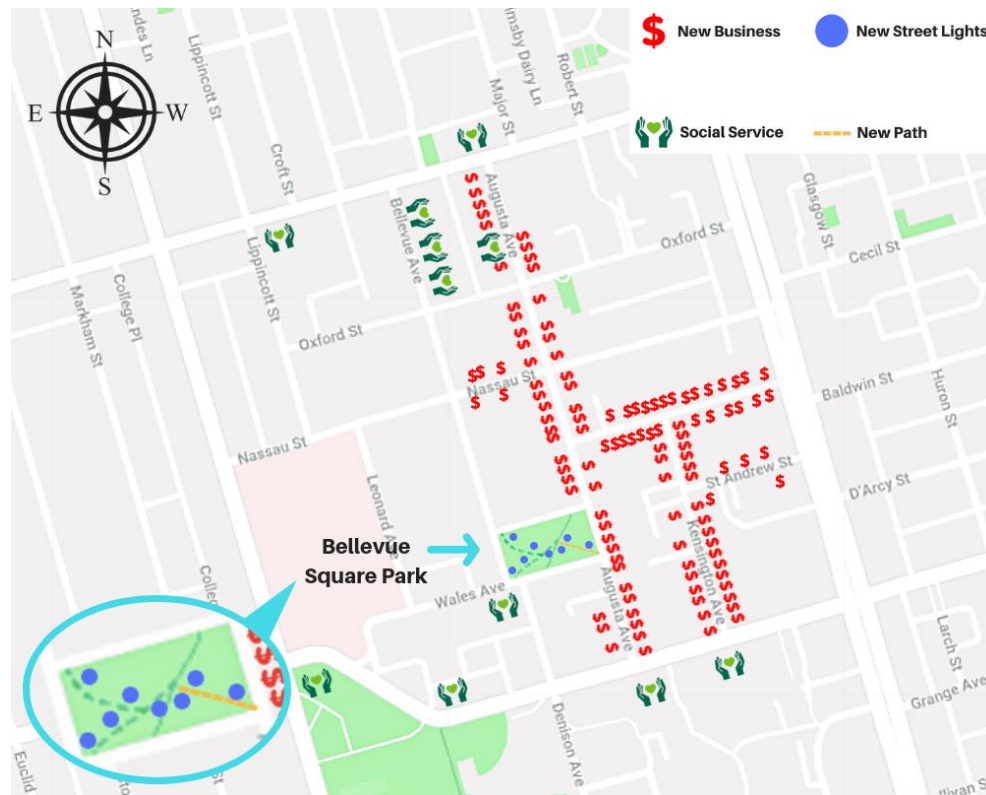
Because we have come to question just *who* the park revitalization is geared to benefit, we decided to map the neighbourhood's social services. They serve as a reminder of the marginalized residents who live there, who are still very much in need of various forms of aid. The services ranged from shelters to addiction programs to affordable daycares, including:

- 674 Dundas St. West Women's Residence
- Homes First Society (Wales Ave)
- Homes First Society (Bellevue Ave)
- Scadding Court Community Centre
- Alexandra Park Community Centre
- Alexandra Park Public Housing
- Kensington Kids Early Learning Centre
- St. Stephen's Community House (incl. Soup kitchen, addiction program, etc.)
- St. Stephen's Community House Day Care
- Access Alliance Multicultural Health and Community Services

These services stand out increasingly, as if they do not belong next to the high-end eateries. Their continued existence is threatened by changing demographics and ever-rising rents. It is important to remember, though, that they are still in use by many original inhabitants of Kensington Market and cannot fall victim to the speculative activities of those with means.

Ultimately, our map shows the tension which exists in Kensington Market today. The upscaling of businesses and migration of higher-income residents are mutually reinforcing at the same time, the social services mirror the needs of the neighbourhood that have existed in the past and persist today. In of our research into Bellevue Square Park, it will be vital to bear in mind this dichotomy in the Market. While increasing safety in the park should be a public good that equally benefits all residents, we will need to investigate how park upgrades have the potential to interact with the gentrification that is underway, and perhaps impact long-standing residents and businesses in the neighbourhood.

Map



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