Analyzing Laneway Housing Potential

Report for the Laneway Project

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Introduction

In their current form, laneways are a drastically underutilized public space that have the potential to be transformed into thriving parts of the public realm and places that could directly serve the needs of the communities in which they are located. The Laneway Project has played a crucial role in improving Toronto's laneways through community projects and advocacy work aimed at transforming laneways from neglected spaces solely for cars into "complete, living public places" (The Laneway Project, n.d.).

One way the potential of Toronto's laneways is being unlocked is through the development of laneway suites. In 2018 the City of Toronto introduced by-law amendments that would allow homeowners to build laneway suites as-of-right, meaning that if the suite is compliant with zoning regulations the project may only require the appropriate building permits. Through this initiative, Toronto joined a host of other cities that permit this form of auxiliary buildings. To further understand how laneway suites can impact housing in Toronto, this studio project posed the following question: frecoTo answer this question, the Laneway Suite Studio began by collecting and analyzing information on three distinct issues:

- **Laneway suite development potential -** A geographical examination to better understand where current laneways suite development is occurring. In order to create a clearer picture of the 'actual' potential of laneway housing in established neighbourhoods, mapping of available lots that qualify for laneway suites per the governing By-law and amendments 810-2018 and 12-2019, Official Plan amendments 403 and 406, and current Fire and Emergency Service Access interpretations.

- **Impact and capacity of existing social infrastructure -** A geographical analysis of social infrastructure to better understand location and utilization, identifying areas of confluence between social infrastructure and laneway suite development potential, with specific attention paid to examining potential, if any, in the thirteen priority neighbourhoods as identified in the Toronto Poverty Reduction Strategy.

- **Barriers to laneway suite development**: A series of interviews with industry professionals involved in the development of laneway suites was undertaken, to gain an expanded understanding of the limiting factors these professionals faced.

The second half of the Studio project considered the collected data more thoroughly. It became clear to the Studio team that due to several factors, which are discussed in further detail below, through the lenses of poverty reduction, laneway suites are not a viable tool for impact in this area. However, while there are certain things laneway suites CANNOT do, all of the things that laneway suites CAN do must not be overlooked. Further exploration to better understand this dichotomy shapes the second half of this report, and attempts to provide a snapshot of the future impact laneway suites could have in the City of Toronto.

City Policies and Plans

Official Plan

The City of Toronto's Official Plan (2019) expresses several goals and policies which laneway suite development can help to achieve. First, laneway suites will not disrupt stable, established neighbourhoods. As will be discussed further below, the areas of the city which have the greatest potential for laneway suite development are in established residential neighbourhoods, primarily comprised of low density detached and semi-detached housing. Adding gentle density to these neighbourhoods takes advantage of investments in infrastructure and services that the City has already made and increases the efficiency of future investments (Policy 2.2). In particular, many laneways are adjacent to higher order transit corridors which the Official Plan identifies as areas where densification should be supported. Furthermore, gentle density increases the supply and availability of rental housing within neighbourhoods. Importantly, by virtue of the limitations imposed by lot sizes and by-laws, laneways suites must necessarily respect the existing pattern of development and cannot be built in such a way that they dominate or significantly change the character of a neighbourhood (Policies 2.3.1 and 3.2.1).

Housing TO Action Plan 2020-2030

The Housing TO Action Plan 2020-2030 is a plan for the City of Toronto that addresses the full housing spectrum. The Housing TO Charter states "it is the policy of the City of Toronto that fair access to a full range of housing is fundamental to strengthening Toronto's economy, its environmental efforts, and the health and social well-being of its residents and communities" (City of Toronto, 2020f, p.ii). Laneway suite potential falls within the following key strategic actions: "Meet the Diverse Needs of Seniors, Create New Rental Responsive to Residents' Needs and Help People Buy, Stay and Improve Their Homes" (City of Toronto, 2020f, p.10, 11). The City of Toronto specifically referred to laneway suites in particular as a way of diversifying and increasing rental housing opportunities across Toronto. Action Point 47b was also created to ensure continued actions to support creation of laneways and secondary suites. Therefore, the viability of laneway suite development would support the goals of the Housing TO Action Plan 2020-2030.

Toronto Poverty Reduction Strategy

The Poverty Reduction Strategy is organized into 17 recommendations. Laneway housing has the potential to address several of these recommendations including increasing the supply of affordable housing, leveraging the economic power of the City to stimulate job growth, engaging residents on poverty reduction efforts, and dedicating funding to poverty reduction actions. The ways in which these recommendations can be addressed will be further discussed throughout the report.

Summary of Findings

Mapping

To complete the key tasks supporting the research question it was determined that it would be necessary to geographically examine the location of existing laneway suites and eligible lots, where eligible lots are located relative to social infrastructure, such as schools, and the location of eligible lots relative to neighbourhoods identified in the Toronto Poverty Reduction Strategy. A range of maps have been created using GIS software, and they illustrate where Toronto's laneways are, where laneway suite building activity is taking place, where eligible properties are located, the location and utilization of social infrastructure, along with the City's Priority Investment Areas and the potential for laneway suites in those locations.

The following maps are included in this document:

- Toronto's Laneway Network
- Laneway Suite Building Activity in Toronto
- Lots that Abut a Laneway for a Minimum of 3.5 metres (Toronto's full potential for laneway suites)
- Eligible Lots, based on current criteria established by City in 2018
- Eligible Lots, based on proposed updates to criteria by City in 2020
- Toronto Libraries by Visits per Capita, 2019
- School Utilization by Neighbourhood (elementary and secondary)
- Overhoused and Underhoused Neighbourhoods
- Parkland Provision
- Toronto's 13 Priority Investment Areas & Eligible Lots
- Illustration of laneway connectivity: Clinton Street Laneway example

As a foundation to the mapping work produced, a map of Toronto's laneway system was created. This document reveals that although laneways exist throughout the city the vast majority of them are located within the former boundaries of Metropolitan Toronto. The location of Toronto's laneways directly influences which neighbourhoods have the potential to build laneway suites, as was discovered through mapping eligible properties using the City's criteria listed in the Laneways Suites By-law.

The social infrastructure surrounding Toronto's laneways was analyzed in order to assess the merits of further densifying these areas. For this, several factors were examined, including the location and utilization rates of elementary, middle, and secondary schools both from the Toronto District School Board (TDSB) and the Toronto Catholic District School Board (TCDSB), the location and visitation rates of Toronto libraries, as well as parkland provision and walkability. The analysis showed that libraries and schools within areas with high potential for laneway development are currently underutilized. Parkland provision is lacking in these same areas for their current populations. As such, increases in any density should also be complemented by increases in green space.

With regard to walkability, the connectivity of laneways was also examined. This looked at the proximity of laneways to schools, libraries, and parkland as well as the connection of a laneway to a major, minor, or local road. The findings showed that 100% of laneways were within 300 metres of an elementary or middle school, 93% were within 300 metres of a park, and 80% were directly connected to a road. In order to increase the desirability of laneway suite development, it may be worthwhile to position laneways as important routes for connectivity to public amenities and as thoroughfares to main streets.

Interviews

As a complement to the mapping component, the initial iteration of the Studio project included a significant interview element. These interviews were conducted with city-building professionals who were, or who have been, involved with the development of laneway suites in the City. By interviewing professionals involved with the development of laneway suites in Toronto, the Laneway Suites Studio team was able to gain insight into matters relating to the research question that could not have been revealed by geographic analysis alone. The data also enabled a more nuanced understanding of the challenges that professionals involved with the design, construction, and permitting process for laneway suites can face.

Interviews with development industry professionals revealed a number of barriers associated with developing laneway suites in the City of Toronto. The most commonly cited barriers to development included: fire and emergency access, neighbour relations and Limiting Distance Agreements, construction logistics, and cost. In addition to these four main barriers, other issues that arose included: homeowner expectations, soft landscaping requirements, location of trees, angular plane requirements, the slow planning process within Toronto, private laneways, shallow and narrow lots, loss of parking, development charges,height restrictions and lack of as-of-right sustainable design options. The majority of professionals interviewed were in agreement that the City of Toronto's by-law was a crucial step forward and no major issues with the 2018/2019 by-law amendments arose. There was a general consensus among interviewees that fire and emergency service access requirements prevent properties from being eligible to develop a laneway suite, while eligible properties are often prevented from moving forward due to neighbour opposition to LDAs and unforeseen cost increases due to drawn out timeframes while trying to meet the latter requirements.

Mapping Methodology

Excel and GIS software were utilized to transform raw data from the City of Toronto, Toronto Public Library, Toronto District School Board, Toronto Catholic District School board, and Walk Score into information that could be used to address the research question. Various techniques were employed across the maps created, and each map required a unique procedure that is available below. To ensure consistency and the ability to cross compare data all the maps produced are at the neighbourhood scale. The accuracy of the data is lost when generalized to neighbourhoods though this generalization does make the data easier to read and compare.

Toronto's laneway network was mapped using data provided by Together Design Lab (TDL) and through the City of Toronto's Open Data Portal. The first map produced layered Toronto's laneways over its neighbourhoods. Major roads were added for context by extracting specific road types from the City's centre line shapefile. The length of laneways was calculated using ArcMap's "calculate geometry" feature and then combined with the neighbourhood layer through a spatial join. In the joining process the total length of laneways within a neighbourhood is automatically calculated and included in the attribute table.

Mapping eligible lots within the City of Toronto involved extensive GIS work. The process was informed by the by-law that regulates laneway suites and fire & emergency service access requirements, as listed in Table 1. However, requirements that are dependent on the architecture and size of the main building and the proposed suite were not included in the mapping process due to restrictions in capacity and capability.

Table 1. Criteria used to identify and map laneway suite eligible properties in the City of Toronto.

Limiting Factor	**City of Toronto Criteria**
Location	A laneway suite is not permitted in the area bounded by Avenue Road, the Canadian Pacific (CP) Limited rail corridor, Yonge Street, Rosedale Valley Road, Sherbourne Street, Bloor Street East and Bloor Street West (City of Toronto By-law 1210-2019)
Zoning	Residential (R Zone): Including Residential Detached Zone (RD) Residential Semi-Detached Zone (RS) Residential Townhouse Zone (RT) Residential Multiple Dwelling Zone (RM)
Minimum Public Laneway Frontage	A laneway suite must be on a lot with a rear lot line or side lot line abutting a lane for at least 3.5 metres
Current Emergency Service Access Requirements 2018	*Accessing the property from the front:* A fire hydrant must be located within 45 metres of where a firefighting vehicle would park in front of the subject property, when providing the path of travel for fire fighter access on the subject property, the path of travel must not be more than 45 metres in length measured from the public street (i.e. where the fire truck is parked) to the entry of the laneway suite and it must be 1 metre wide. *Accessing the property from the Laneway:* A fire hydrant must be located within 45 metres of where a firefighting vehicle would park on the street at the entrance of a laneway, when providing the path of travel for firefighting access through the lane, the path of travel must not be more than 45 metres in length measured from the street at the end of the lane to the entrance of the laneway suite.

Proposed Emergency Service Access Requirements 2020	*Accessing the property from the front:* A fire hydrant must be located within 45 metres of where a firefighting vehicle would park in front of the subject property, when providing the path of travel for fire fighter access on the subject property, the path of travel must not be more than 90 metres in length measured from the public street (i.e. where the fire truck is parked) to the entry of the laneway suite and it must be 0.9 metre wide. *Accessing the property from the Laneway:* A fire hydrant must be located within 45 metres of where a firefighting vehicle would park on the street at the entrance of a laneway, when providing the path of travel for firefighting access through the lane, the path of travel must not be more than 90 metres in length measured from the street at the end of the lane to the entrance of the laneway suite.

The process began with determining which lots abut a laneway for a minimum of 3.5 metres. This was done by extracting property boundaries that abut a laneway in residential zones, excluding the Yorkville area, and then calculating the length of the rear lot line. Using a query, all properties with a lot line abutting a laneway for a minimum of 3.5 metres were saved as a separate data layer.

The next phase applied the fire and emergency service access criteria to the layer of lots that abut a laneway for at least 3.5 metres. ArcMap's Network Analyst tool was used to determine the range of locations in which a fire truck can park and the further area to which a fire hose is able to reach under the current guidelines. This tool uses road networks to accurately identify routes based on specific criteria and is more precise than the buffer tool. Two road networks were created: 1) a road network that a fire truck would use in order to determine where they could park and 2) a laneway network to determine which properties could be serviced through a laneway. A layer with massing data was used to establish if properties had the required side access necessary to service a property from its front. The City's massing file combines semi-detached and row houses as one polygon, thus property boundaries were used to split them. Because it was not feasible to split polygons on a case-by-case basis the advanced splitting tool was applied to each property. A downfall of doing so is that it trims the massing of buildings that cross property lines. Since the process begins with imperfect data the issues are carried through the process. Once split, buffers were generated to verify whether or not a property had side access that was at least 1 metre in width. To determine which properties would be eligible with the September 2020 proposed changes to fire and emergency service access requirements the second phase was repeated but with a different hose length and side access width. To determine the number of eligible lots in each neighbourhood the layer of eligible lots was then joined with the neighbourhood layer to create a choropleth map showing the total number of eligible lots in each neighbourhood. Please see the mapping instructions located in the appendix for more details on the process.

Laneway suite building activity was sourced from the City of Toronto's Application Information Centre. To determine where laneway suites are being built, or where applications to build them have been made, building permit data from 2018, 2019 and 2020 was downloaded and scrubbed. This data was filtered to identify and isolate laneway suite applications using the search terms "laneway

suite" and "laneway house". The permit applications related to laneway suites were then organized and grouped by address, as most properties had multiple permits attached to them. The properties were then divided by four classifications depending on the mix of permits attached to the address and the status of the permits. The first classification is *built or in-progress* laneway suites. These are properties that have at least three specific permits that are required to build a laneway suite: 1) a small residential projects permit; 2) a plumbing permit and; 3) a HVAC permit. In order to meet this classification, the status of the permits was either closed, inspection or remit issued. The second class is *upcoming* laneways suites. These properties have the three permits previously mentioned above, but the status of them is 'issuance pending' or 'ready for issuance'. The third class is *applications underway*. These properties have only one or two of the three required permits listed for the first classification, and the status of the permit indicates that it is still active. The fourth classification is *cancelled or refused applications*. These properties have the correct three permits, but their status is either cancelled or refused. Once classified, the addresses were then geocoded in ArcMap using an address locator that was created from the City's municipal address point data. To visualize laneway suite building activity at the neighbourhood level a spatial join was completed and a choropleth map was created. Please see the mapping instructions located in the appendix for more details on the process.

The next task was to map each of the social infrastructure services that were identified as important to be available locally for potential laneway suite inhabitants: education, library service, and parkland. To identify the availability of local education options for families, school utilization was mapped using the most up-to-date information on school enrollment and capacity that was available from TDSB and TCDSB. Private schools and French public schools were not included in the analysis as the former do not draw their students from a localized catchment area, as public schools tend to do, and the latter are relatively insignificant in number in the City of Toronto. TDSB and TCDSB schools were geolocated from addresses or existing shapefiles and joined with school enrollment and capacity data from 2019 (TDSB) or 2016 (TCDSB). Elementary and middle schools were mapped together while secondary schools were mapped separately given the significant differences in their catchment areas. Schools that have irregular enrollment such as adult schools or alternative schools were excluded from the analysis. Utilization rates for the remaining schools were calculated and expressed through enrollment as a percentage of capacity. The schools were then spatially joined with the City of Toronto's neighbourhood boundaries and average utilization was calculated for all of the schools that fell within the same neighbourhoods. The categories of utilization assigned to the map were based on TDSB and provincial guidelines for school utilization. Less than 80% utilization was categorized as low utilization, 80-90% as optimal, 90-100% as high and greater than 100% as overcapacity. The result of this process indicates approximate utilization rates of schools within a neighbourhood but ignores catchment areas, which in many cases extend across neighbourhood boundaries. It should also be noted that at least one additional school has opened since 2019 for each school board. Therefore, the findings are only accurate up to and including the years from which the data was collected.

Library data was analyzed using a similar process to schools though it was not averaged across neighbourhoods, as many branches lie directly or almost directly along neighbourhood boundaries and it was felt that averaged data across a neighbourhood would not be an accurate representation of local library service provision. The number of library visits per capita was calculated for each branch (neighbourhood and district level branches only) based on the number of visits in their most recent complete year of operation and on the population of each library's catchment area. This was used as a proxy for library utilization though it should be noted that the number of visits to a particular library branch can vary drastically based on the programs and services that it offers and the population that it serves. Utilization was then categorized on a scale from "very low" to "very high" based on the average city-wide utilization rate. The resulting map represents each branch's utilization based on the size of its marker.

Parkland was determined to be an important social infrastructure given that laneway suite residents may have limited access to front or backyards or limited green space in general on the property in which they live. Furthermore, the City of Toronto's Official Plan (2019) identifies connectivity to open space as an important feature of the urban environment. Parkland provision was mapped using the City's parkland shapefile (2020) including ravine areas. This was intersected with neighbourhood boundaries and then neighbourhood-wide parkland provision was calculated as a percentage of the total area of each neighbourhood. The results were separated into quartiles which were categorized from "very low" to "very high" provision levels, and represented as a choropleth map.

In addition to social infrastructure, housing provision was examined in terms of overhousing and unsuitable housing to identify the extent to which laneway housing can address some of the goals of the Housing TO Action Plan. Overhousing was determined by dividing the number of residents in a neighbourhood by the total number of bedrooms, or Persons Per Bedroom (PPB). However, this measurement is subject to minor inaccuracy as it does not account for spare bedrooms nor for all bedrooms in households that have more than four bedrooms. A result of less than 1 PPB in a neighbourhood was categorized as overhoused. Unsuitable housing is defined as more than 2 PPB per the National Occupancy Standards. The rate of unsuitable housing in each census area is calculated directly by Statistics Canada. Overhousing and rates of unsuitable housing were represented on a choropleth map at the neighbourhood level.

Laneway connectivity was determined by assessing both the Walk Scores of each neighbourhood and the proximity of laneways to parkland, schools, libraries, and connections with major, minor, and local roads. To do this, laneways that fell within 300 metres of a school, a library, and parkland were isolated. 300 metres was chosen as a measure for a short walking distance, as this is the general distance traveled in a three to four minute walk and is a reasonable measure of good connectivity. The selected laneways were further filtered, keeping only those that intersect with a major, minor, or local road at both ends. This was done to eliminate any deadend laneways and to

highlight those that may act as thoroughfares between larger routes. Finally, all laneways meeting the above requirements were intersected together to identify those with the greatest connectivity.

Mapping Findings

Figure 1 shows that over 300 km of public laneways exist in Toronto. Though they can be found throughout the city, the highest concentrations of laneways are in Old Toronto and East York. The location of Toronto's laneways determines which neighbourhoods have the greatest potential to build and support laneway suites. Of the 445,565 residential lots in the City of Toronto, 47,096 of them abut a laneway for a minimum of 3.5 metres, per the requirement in zoning by-law 569-2013 (Fig. 2A & 2B).

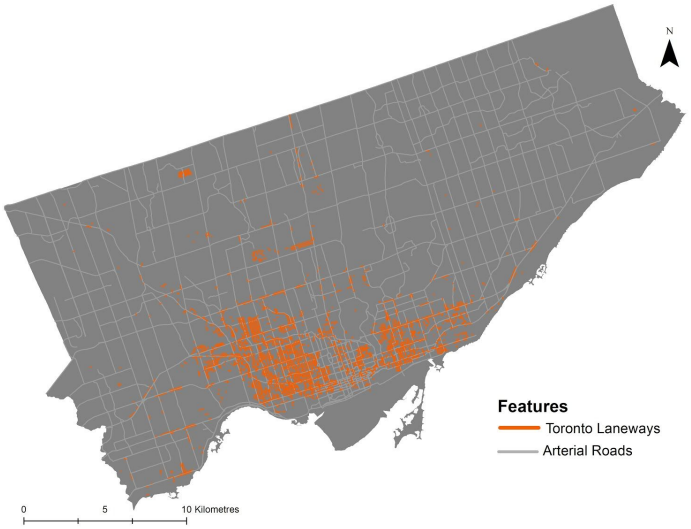


Figure 1. Toronto's Laneway Network

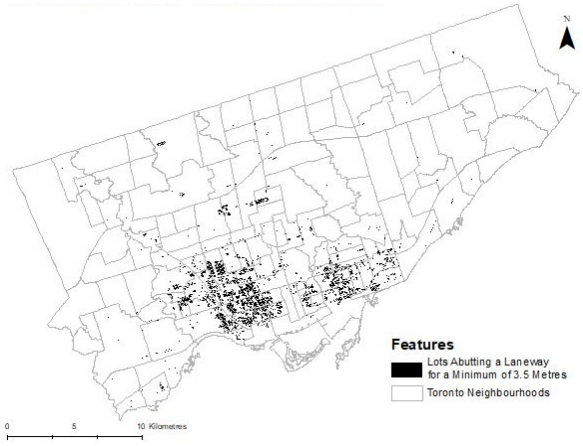


Figure 2A. Lots abutting a laneway for a minimum of 3.5 metres.

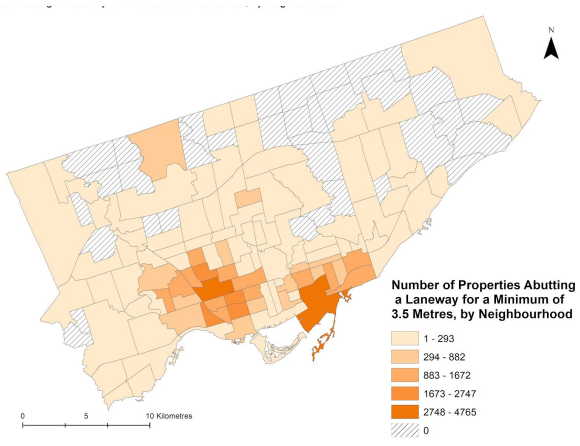


Figure 2B. Lots abutting a laneway for a minimum of 3.5 metres, by Neighbourhood.

This number can be seen as the full potential in terms of laneway suite development within Toronto. By applying the fire and emergency services access requirements as set out by the City in 2018 (see Table 1) the total number of eligible lots was reduced by approximately 41% to 27,905 (Fig. 3A & 3B).

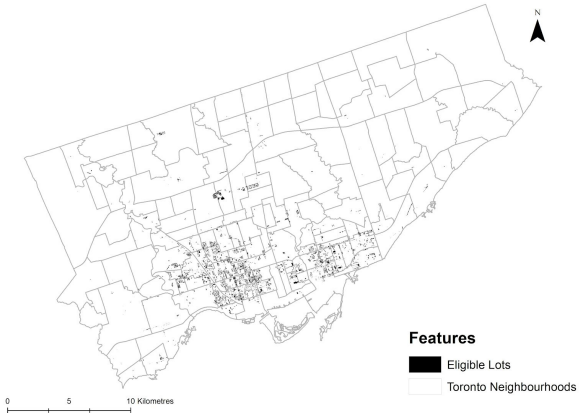


Figure 3A. Eligible lots under current fire and emergency services access requirements.

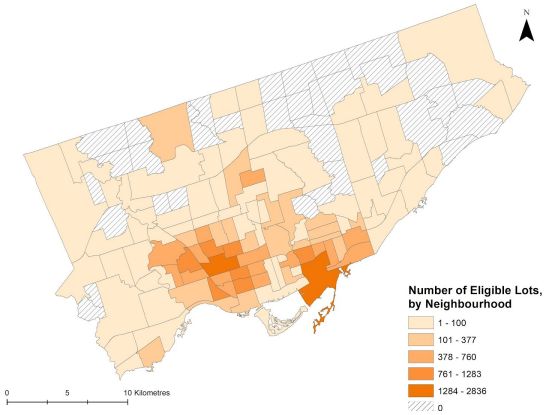


Figure 3B. Eligible lots under current fire and emergency services access requirements, by Neighbourhood.

However, in September 2020 a proposal was made to Council to update fire and emergency service requirements so that the side access requirement was reduced to 0.9 metres clearance and an additional 45m was added to the available hose length. This increased the number of eligible lots by 30% to a total of 36,176 lots (Fig. 4A & 4B). The change in requirements means that three quarters of all of Toronto's laneway abutting lots are now eligible for laneway suites. Table 2 summarizes the total number of eligible lots under the various requirements.

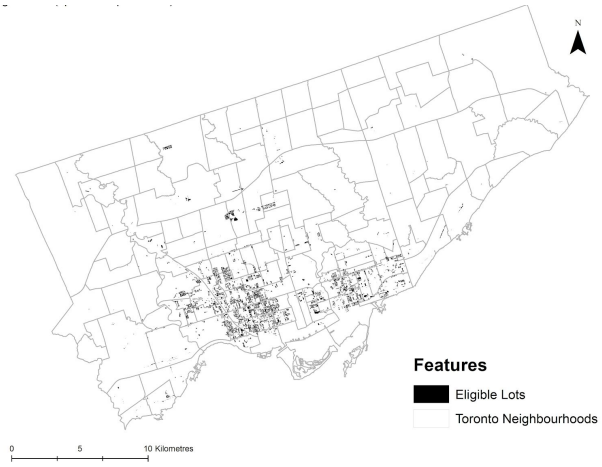


Figure 4A. Eligible lots under proposed fire and emergency services access requirements.

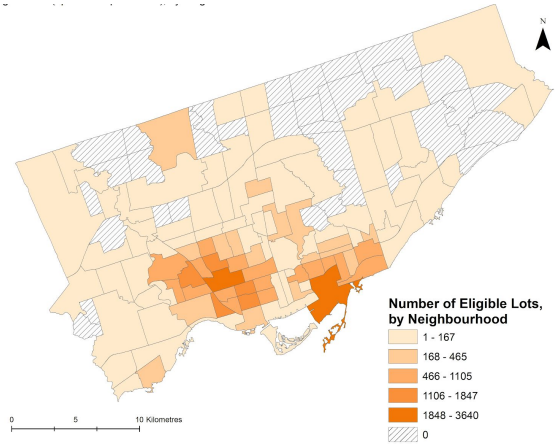


Figure 4B. Eligible lots under proposed fire and emergency service requirements, by Neighbourhood.

Table 2. Total eligible laneway suite properties under various access conditions.

Property Condition	Number of Eligible Lots
Abut a laneway for a minimum of 3.5 metres	47,096
Abut a laneway for a minimum of 3.5 m and can be accessed by fire and emergency services under 2018 requirements	27,905
Abut a laneway for a minimum of 3.5 m and can be accessed by fire and emergency services under 2020 proposed requirements	36,176

The neighbourhoods with the highest number of eligible lots are, in descending order, Dovercourt-Wallace Emerson-Junction (DWEJ), South Riverdale, Palmerston-Little Italy, Trinity Bellwoods, and Corso Italia-Davenport as shown in Table 3. It should be noted that these lots were not screened based on the size of the primary dwelling and depth of the lot which could also impact the feasibility of building a laneway suite, these factors must be addressed on a case-by-case basis.

Table 3. Top five neighbourhoods with properties abutting a laneway by a minimum of 3.5 m (A), under 2018 access requirements (B), and under 2020 access requirements (C).

	Property Condition		
Neighbourhood	A	B	C
DWEJ	4765	2836	3640
South Riverdale	3597	1925	2588
Trinity Bellwoods	2747	1283	1847
Corso Italia - Davenport	2438	1207	1697
Palmerston - Little Italy	2335	1195	1623

Laneway suite building activity was then examined by accessing building permit applications from 2018 onward from the City of Toronto's Open Data Portal. As of September 2020, applications were submitted for 156 properties (0.6% of eligible lots under current restrictions). Figures 5A and 5B show that the greatest amount of development interest is occurring in four of the five neighbourhoods with the greatest number of eligible lots, with the Annex taking the place of Corso Italia-Davenport (see Appendix 1(a) for all neighbourhoods with laneway suite building permit applications, categorized by permit status). This suggests that there may be other factors, such as demographics and socio-economics, that influence the integration of laneway suites within a neighbourhood. Not all applications have been successful (see Table 4), 22% have been cancelled or refused and half are built or in-progress or upcoming. Just over a quarter of applications are still in progress, and it's unclear if they will be successful. To develop a better understanding of what may or may not influence the success of an application the housing typology of properties was

examined (ee Appendix 1(b) for all neighbourhoods with laneway suite building permit applications, categorized by housing typology). Table 4 reveals that the predominant housing type are detached and semi-detached houses. To better understand the typology of properties with successful laneway suite building permit applications the length and depth of the 56 lots with built-up or in-progress suites were measured . The length of these properties ranged from 31.4-53.3 metres, and averaged around 38 metres, and the width ranged from 3.6-14.6 metres, though the average is 7.5 metres. The average width of properties with successful permit applications suggests that wide lots may be more favourable for laneway suites.

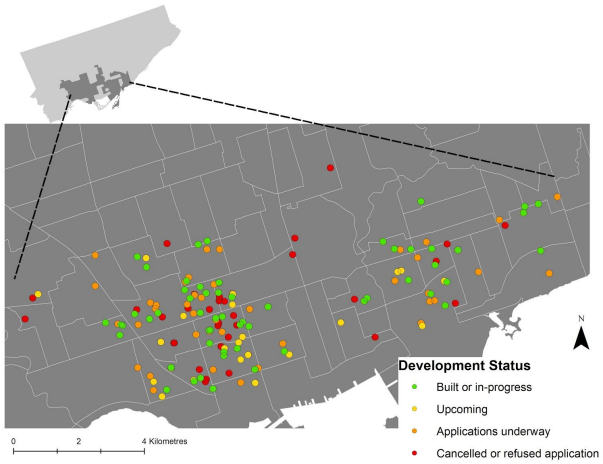


Figure 5A. Development applications in Old Toronto and East York.

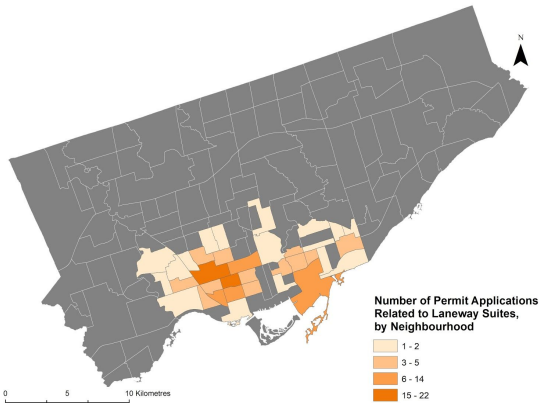


Figure 5B. Development applications, by neighbourhood.

Table 4. Laneway suite development applications by application status and housing typology.

Application Status	Row House	Detached	Detached, rear lot	Semi-detached	Total
Built or in-progress	6	30	2	18	56
Upcoming	2	15	0	5	22
Applications underway	4	23	0	17	44
Cancelled or refused	0	15	0	19	34
Total	12	83	2	59	156

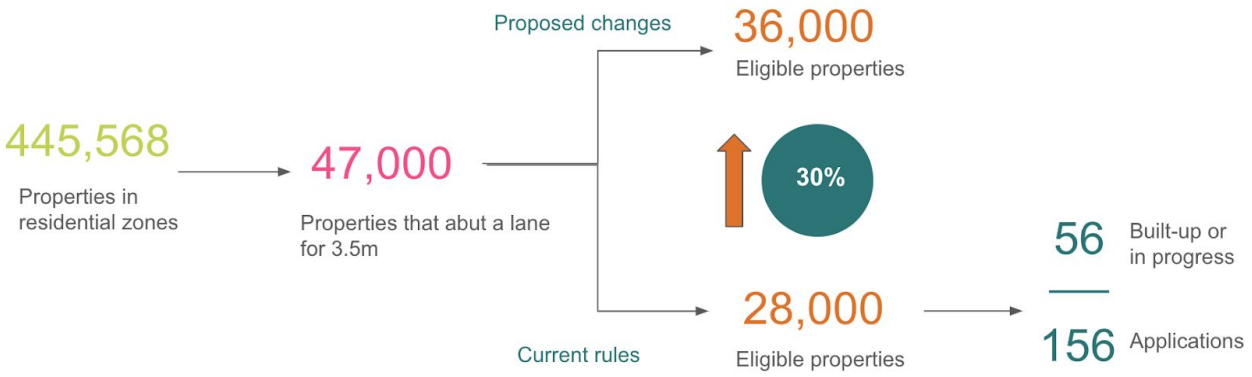


Figure 6. Summary of eligibility figures.

In terms of the availability of public education for future laneway suite families, the average utilization of elementary and middle schools (Fig. 7A) and of high schools (Fig. 7B) per neighbourhood show that neighbourhoods with the greatest number of eligible lots tend to have underutilized schools.

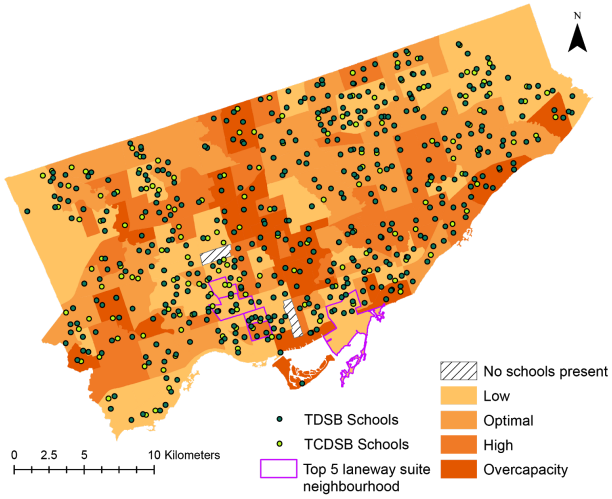


Figure 7A. Elementary and middle school utilization rates by neighbourhood.

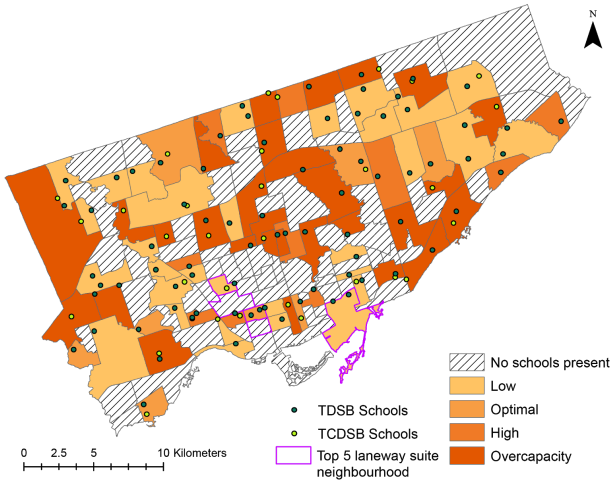


Figure 7B. High school utilization rates by neighbourhood.

Figure 8 shows that this trend can also be observed in public libraries. Branches located in the top five eligible property neighbourhoods tend to have below average visit rates while those with above average visit rates tend to be in suburban neighbourhoods. Conversely, parkland provision shows greater disparity between the top five neighbourhoods. DWEJ, Palmerston-Little Italy, and Trinity Bellwoods have a parkland provision well below the City average, as shown in Figure 9. Portions of these neighbourhoods have been identified by the City as Areas of Parkland Need (City of Toronto, 2019). Finally, Figure 10 shows that the majority of neighbourhoods with laneway suite potential also have high walk scores.

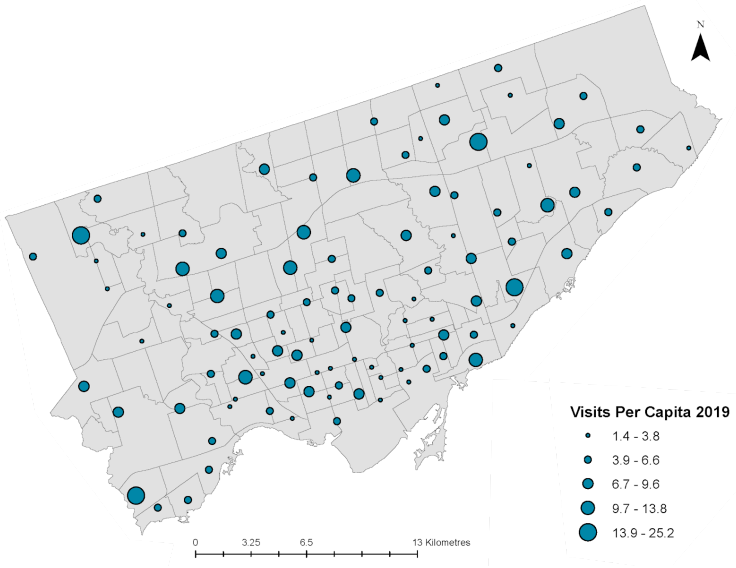


Figure 8. Library branch locations and utilization.

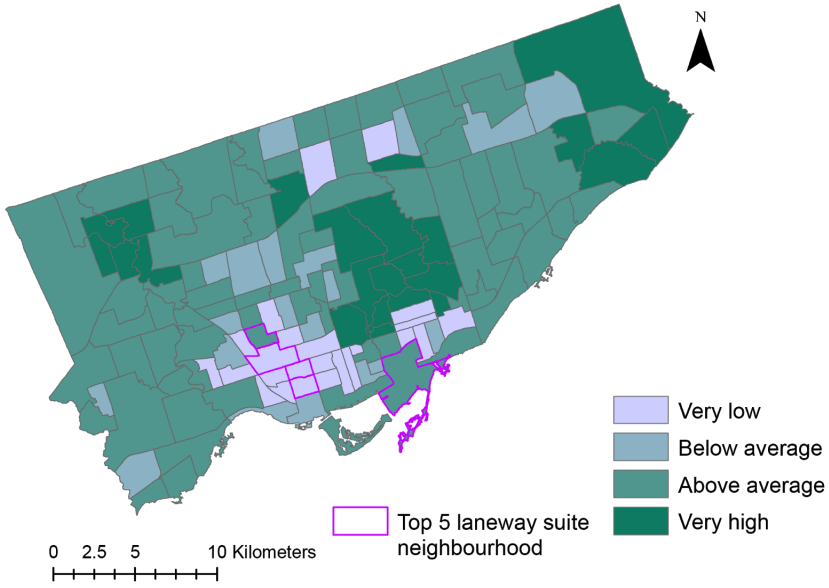


Figure 9. Parkland provision by percent area of each neighbourhood.

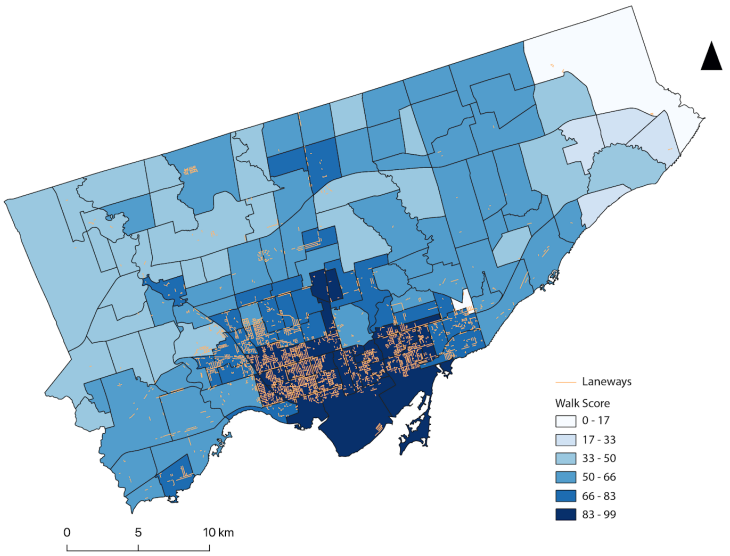
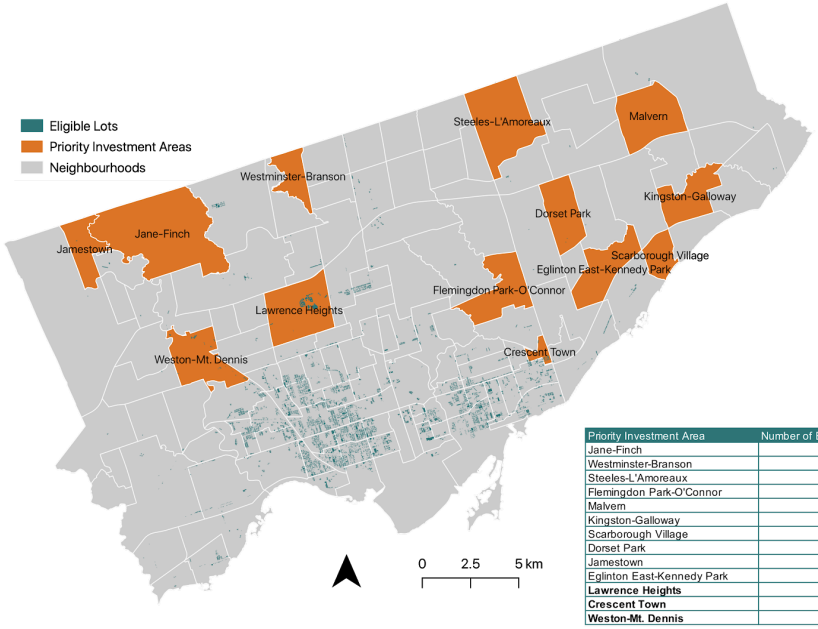


Figure 10. Walk Score by neighbourhood

As described in the methodology, laneway suite eligible neighbourhoods were also examined in terms of poverty reduction goals, overhousing, and unsuitable housing. Figure 11 shows that only three of the Poverty Reduction Strategy's Priority Investment Neighbourhoods have a significant number of eligible laneway properties, indicating low potential for laneway suites to increase housing stock or affordable housing in these areas. Meanwhile, the neighbourhoods which have a large number of eligible lots are characterized by low rates of unsuitable housing (Fig. 12). In fact, three of the top five neighbourhoods are overhoused, possibly indicating potential for homeowners to downsize to laneway suites while renting out the primary dwelling.



Priority Investment Area	Number of Eligible Lots
Jane-Finch	0
Westminster-Branson	0
Steeles-L'Amoreaux	0
Flemingdon Park-O'Connor	0
Malvern	0
Kingston-Galloway	0
Scarborough Village	2
Dorset Park	4
Jamestown	4
Eglinton East-Kennedy Park	12
Lawrence Heights	**47**
Crescent Town	**158**
Weston-Mt. Dennis	**171**

Figure 11. Priority Investment Areas and eligible lots.

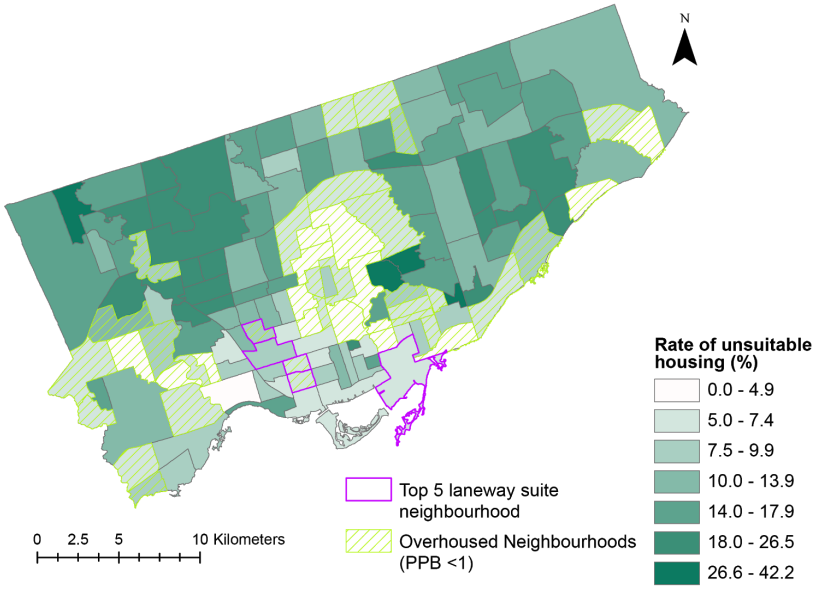


Figure 12. Overhousing and rate of unsuitable housing by neighbourhood.

Taken together the data indicates that the top five neighbourhoods for laneway suite development are all located in Old Toronto's west end and in East York. These neighbourhoods generally have sufficient social infrastructure capacity already available to handle gentle densification through laneway suite construction. The exception is parkland provision but laneways in parts of these neighbourhoods that are in relatively close proximity to parkland could be targeted while the City acquires additional parkland over time. The data also indicates that laneway suites are not positioned to directly support the goals of the Poverty Reduction Strategy. Table 4 summarizes these findings.

Table 4. Summary of social infrastructure provision in the top five neighbourhoods for laneway suite potential.

	Corso Italia - Davenport	DWEJ	Palmerston - Little Italy	South Riverdale	Trinity - Bellwoods
Library utilization					
School utilization					
Parkland provision					
Walkability					
Over-housing					
Unsuitable housing					

No data · Very low · Below Average · Above Average · Very high

Interview Methodology

When addressing the question of who to approach as potential interview candidates, effort was made to speak to a wide range of city-building professionals, and to more than one professional in each vocational category, to ensure we were allowing for a diversity of opinions within any given professional group.

Initially, the interview team reached out to 14 development and real estate industry professionals. These were professionals with whom the team's faculty supervisor or client had a professional relationship, or who were easily identifiable as individuals within their field who had experience or connections to laneway suites.

In total, 17 interviews were conducted over Zoom between October 6th and November 6th, 2020. See Appendix 4 for the full list of interviewees. The interviews were conducted in two person teams, with one interview team member conducting the interviews, and one member taking notes. After gaining permission from the interviewees, all of the interviews were either audio/video recorded for the purpose of clarifying notes taken during the interview. The professional breakdown of the interviewees is as follows:

- 6 Architects/Designers
- 3 Urban Planners
- 2 Developers
- 3 Lawyers
- 2 Real Estate Professionals
- 1 Building Code Consultant

The interviews were semi-structured and the questions were designed to solicit information based solely on each interviewees professional experience. Multiple, slightly modified versions of the questions were produced in order to tailor interviews to each interviewee's specific area of expertise (e.g. architecture, real estate or law). Each interviewee was provided with a copy of the interview questions, as well as an information sheet about the Laneway Suite Studio project in advance of their interview (see Appendix 2(a)(b)[1,2] and Appendix 3 respectively). After each interview was conducted, participants were sent a Google Form '*Analyzing Laneway Housing Potential Interview Survey*' (Appendix 5) to allow participants to indicate how, if at all,

- They would like to be identified in any final report documents
- What professionals designations they would like to be associated with
- Whether the Studio team could use direct quotations
- If they would like a copy of a final report document
- If they would like a copy of their interview session notes

See Appendix 6 for Interviewee survey responses.

The question set consisted of eight individual questions grouped into five thematic sub-sections. Interview questions were asked in the same order for each interviewee. Given the semi-structured format of the interview questions, if the interview team believed a participant had already answered a question prior to arriving at it during the course of the interview, discretion was used on whether to pose the questions again. See Appendix 7 for a copy of interview session notes.

Before the interviews were conducted, the question set was piloted with two architects who are leading practitioners in the field of laneway suite development in Toronto. They provided valuable feedback regarding the structure and content of the question set. These two professionals are not included in our total count of interviewees, but their value to the project as a pilot audience must be noted.

[1] Each interviewee was presented with the same question set. However, small changes were made based on the interviewee's profession in order to make the master question set more relevant to their professional experience.

[2] Rodeny Gill, Solicitor, City of Toronto was interviewed with a different question set. Mr. Gill's experience with laneway suits is with LDAs and a separate set of questions was designed for his interview. See this question set in Appendix 2(b).

Interview Findings

Data on Minor Variance Applications

Anita McLeod, Manager and Deputy Secretary Treasurer, Committee of Adjustment Toronto and East York, was unable to be interviewed given her role and the quasi-judicial nature of the Committee of Adjustment (personal communication, 2020). However, she was able to share data on the number of minor variance applications in Toronto and East York relating to laneway suites that have taken place since 2017 (Table 5).

Table 5. Minor variance applications for laneway suites in Old Toronto and East York, 2017-2020.

Year	Number of Minor Variance Applications
2017	3
2018	14
2019	56
2020	28

Note, the number of applications listed under 2020 is as of October 28, 2020. These annual changes could indicate that the uptake in laneway suite projects are designs that are not within the as-of-right by-law guidance. Further research into the committee of adjustment decisions would be necessary to understand why this is the case and what trends are observed so as to analyze against the by-law regulations.

It was also noted through these communications that the Committee of Adjustment Toronto and East York deals with at least one laneway suite application per hearing and not all get approved. She was unable to tell us how many of the approved suites have been completed, as the Committee of Adjustment does not track construction. An area for further research could involve using the Committee of Adjustment Research portal to search for decisions related to laneway suites and to analyze them against successfully developed laneway suites.

Cost

Based on interview findings, costs associated with laneway suite development are the second largest barrier for projects. Ultimately, all barriers including: fire and emergency service access, neighbour relations and LDAs, and construction logistics result in increased expenses. A common theme that arose was a lack of understanding from homeowners about how much a laneway suite would cost to build due to their inherently complex nature. One practitioner stated that “people expect it to be like building a garden shed, when it’s actually like building a home”.

In addition to the lack of understanding associated with laneway suite costs, other cost related

barriers cited by industry professionals included: potential difficulty gaining financing, minor variance approvals, soft costs associated with designers, architects, and lawyers, which can make up 20-30% of total cost, and general servicing costs.

The interviews with pre-fabricated laneway suite builders and custom laneway builders revealed that laneway suites are a large investment, as they can range from $250-450 sq ft with an average hovering around $350 sq ft. It was not clear from the interviews which option (prefabricated or custom-built) is more cost effective as responses from different interviewees were contradictory. However, most professionals indicated that homeowners renting out laneway suites would likely seek market rate rent or above in order to see a return on their investment.

Construction

Construction logistics also emerged from interviews as an important factor for consideration. This barrier was not the most frequently discussed (only 4 out of 15 interviewees mentioned it), but it presented a unique set of challenges for interviewees. Practitioners spoke about issues related to working on laneway suite sites due to poor telephone and internet infrastructure, limited staging room/access to construction materials, the difficulty of accessing sites while using large construction vehicles, and challenges with finding general contractors with experience in the laneway suite realm. One Interviewee emphasized the relationship between narrow laneway widths and restricted access to these laneways, which results in an inability to use larger trucks. In addition, staging and construction vehicles can block laneways. These restrictions translate into increased costs due to the need for more trips and loads necessitated by use of smaller trucks. In addition, this interviewee noted that there is little space for storage on site; making this an inefficient way to build. Other interviewees offered candid recommendations, including the need for smaller construction vehicles.

Fire and Emergency Access

Ontario Building Code (OBC) Dic. B 9.10.20.3 is the section which Toronto Fire Services interprets to set fire access requirements for new laneway suite development. The section reads:

> ***(1)*** *Access for fire department equipment shall be provided to each building by means of a street, private roadway or yard.*
>
> ***(2)*** *Where access to a building as required in Sentence (1) is provided by means of a roadway or yard, the design and location of such roadway or yard shall take into account connection with public thoroughfares, weight of firefighting equipment, width of roadway, radius of curves, overhead clearance, location of fire hydrants, location of fire department connections and vehicular parking.* (Government of Ontario, 2020)

Based on regulations under this section of the OBC, Toronto Fire Services uses the following guidelines for providing emergency access to a new laneway suite:

> **Path of Travel (45m):** the path of travel to the subject property must not be more than 45 metres in

length measured from the public street to the entry of the laneway suite.

- In terms of the laneway, the path of travel must not be more than 45 metres in length measured from the street at the end of the lane to the entrance of the laneway suite.

Fire Hydrant (45m): A fire hydrant must also be located within 45 metres of where a firefighting vehicle would park in front of the subject property.

Side Access (1m x 2.1m): an unobstructed path must be provided to the entry of the laneway suite, at least 1 metre wide and 2.1 metres in height.

In order to address the challenge of lots where a portion of the 1 metre required as an unobstructed path falls onto the neighbours property, the City of Toronto created a Limiting Distancing Agreement (LDA). More complex than a right-of-way agreement, LDAs allow for the space between two houses to be "shared" as a fire and emergency access route, when the space between each individual property line and primary residence would not meet the current 1.0m criteria. The LDA which holds the subject property, the neighbour, and the City of Toronto as parties to the agreement and for which. The agreement is an obligation that cannot be broken without all parties consent (City of Toronto, 2019c). As discussed with the Rodney Gill, Solicitor at the City of Toronto responsible for applying to LDA process specifically to laneway suite development, the reason for which it is not an easement agreement and rather an LDA with three parties is to ensure that the agreement "stays with the land", where the shared access is maintained should there be a change in ownership.

Based on the interviews conducted, fire and emergency service access was overwhelmingly the most noted barrier amongst professional interviewees. It was mentioned as a barrier in every interview conducted, and was often mentioned by interviewees as the largest barrier they faced to developing laneway suites. Interviewees expressed frustrations around these rules as interpretations, with difficulty in obtaining information on why these measurements were used specifically for laneway suites based on the Building Code regulations above. More specifically, David Hine, Building Code consultant, highlighted that one section in which the 45m and 90m is explicitly laid out is that of Section 3.2.5.5 Sentence 2, relating to larger buildings. The Building Code regulations stated above for which laneway suites are governed relate to the Section on small buildings with floor areas of 600 sq. metres. Interviewees also expressed that these interpretations are more limiting than other areas of the Province, and that fire fighting equipment in Toronto has not yet evolved to a denser city; providing the example of Hamilton introducing smaller trucks to be used in more densely populated areas of the city (City of Hamilton, 2018). Another interviewee compared these interpretations to those of basement suites, illustrating that basement suites can have entrances from the back of the house or on the side of the house, and the 1m side access for fire and emergency services is not a requirement, but for a laneway suite that is 5m away it is.

Another important issue is that of the LDA process. As described by Rodeny Gill, a solicitor with the City of Toronto, if needed, a valid LDA will effectively allow the property owner proposing a

laneway suite to "borrow" the land required to facilitate and ensure OBC compliance for fire service access to the proposed suite. If there is a valid LDA in place, it can be recognized and acknowledged that the limiting distance area (no build zone) happens to provide OBC compliance for firefighter access. The fire service access being secured happens to be a consequence of the LDA. Architect and design firms interviewees expressed that neighbour relations related to the LDA process for shared side access for fire and emergency services was a significant factor in stopping projects from going forward. It was noted that even after a full year of a project moving ahead and securing initial verbal agreement around the shared access, neighbours will back out of the agreement, which ultimately stops a project from moving forward. It was also mentioned that LDAs can cause problems later in the development process as, even if they do not stop a project outright, negotiations with neighbours can add further time and cost considerations to a site, with neighbours even asking for compensation in some cases.

The City of Toronto Solicitor responsible for the LDA process for laneway suites stated that once it gets to the stage of the City of Toronto, the process is relatively quick as it requires "1-4 hours review" (City of Toronto, 2019c). Therefore, the challenges tend to occur prior to the agreement reaching the City of Toronto for review, when the subject property is negotiating with neighbours. The City of Toronto also mentioned that one aspect that adds time to the initial process for the interested homeowner is dealing with lenders, whom given this is a new housing typology in the City, are not as aware as to the context and therefore requiring more time to explain the requirements and the postponements required as part of the LDA process.

As of November 5, 2020, based on an interview with Rodney Gill, Solicitor at City of Toronto, there were approximately 31 signed LDAs to date relating to Laneway Suites. The number in total at the City, including those signed, is 40. There have been more inquiries than this, however they have not yet reached the stage of signature at the City of Toronto level. In terms of efficacy, the interviewee emphasized that the LDA is as simple as a legal agreement can be, as there is an online public template that prompts users how to populate. The interviewee also believes that although he provides general advice about the process to those who seek it, he cannot be providing legal advice to interested private homeowners, given that his client is the City of Toronto.

The issues emerging from fire and emergency access requirements are not new news, and recent discussions at the September City Council meeting will likely lead to a more leeway around these specific restrictions. There is wide recognition from the City of Toronto and from the Building Code Commission for Toronto Building to "develop generic alternative solutions to meet the fire department access requirements in the design and construction of Laneway Suites" (City of Toronto, 2020e). Toronto Building hired a building code consultant to review the matter, for which the following recommendations were made:

- **90 metre** distance from fire department apparatus to the Laneway Suite, where the fire department apparatus is within 45m of a hydrant and and additional mitigating features are provided for:

- For example: automatic sprinkler system, passive protection (increased fire protection on the exterior walls, limiting openings and cladding building faces with non-combustible materials under certain conditions)

- **0.9 metre** unobstructed side access

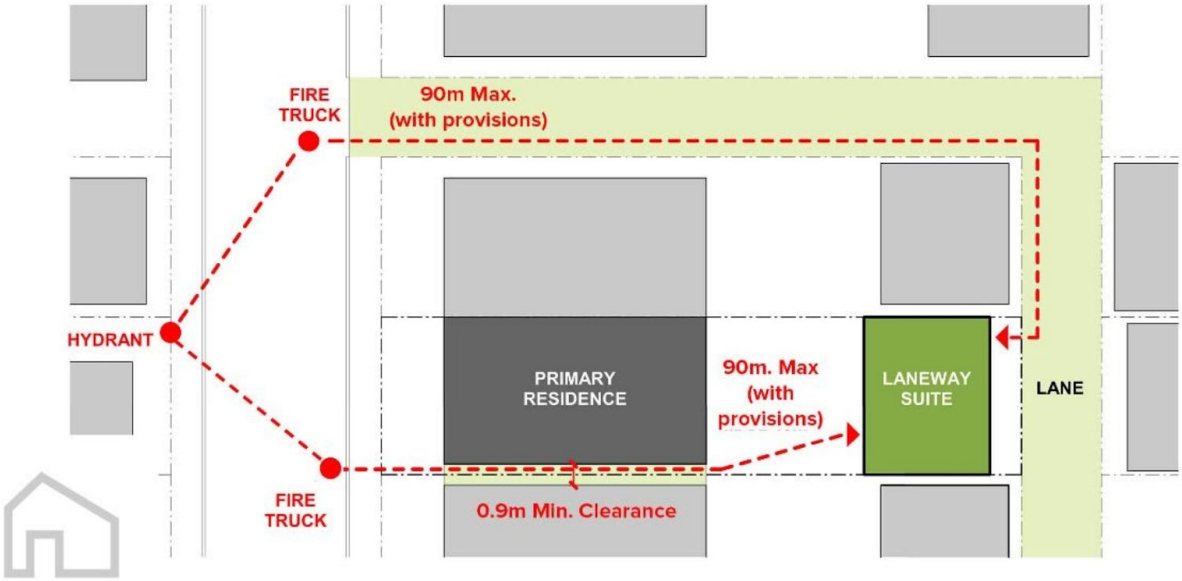


Figure 13. An illustration of emergency access recommendations from September 2020 for laneway suites (Source: Lanescape, 2020).

There was both acknowledgement by interviewees of the improvements being made in this regard, as well as concern that the steps proposed would not make a significant difference. As discussed above, an analysis of both the old and new fire access requirements relative to eligible lots in the City of Toronto was performed and showed that changes to the regulations did indeed increase the number of eligible lots.

For further analysis, it could be asked how the 'conservative' interpretation of fire access restrictions impacts the viability of laneway suite development over the long term? Overall, as the City of Toronto continues to grow and transform, how can fire and emergency services better respond to new housing typologies that are needed to alleviate the city's housing crisis?

Other Comments Noted in the Interviews

- Laneway housing is not the most accessible housing typology due to costing, permitting, feasibility, and construction logistics.
- The City should facilitate increased engagement and information sharing to be more transparent about the process
- Education is important! Neighbours and homeowners need to understand what is allowed to be built under the by-law

- People still hold negative perceptions about renters
- Implementing laneway suites is complex!
- Laneway suites allow the eldery to remain in their neighbourhoods and by doing so the ability to age with greater dignity
- Laneway suites on their own are not the solution to Toronto's affordable housing issues, but they open up the conversation around new housing typologies
- Some interviewees expressed "decreased access to City Hall" and recommended having a dedicated team on laneway suites at the City to facilitate communications.
- Many interviewees also noted that the soft landscaping requirements could be decreased, as well as adjusted to allow green roofs to be included.
- One interviewee recommended that the City have a selection of pre-approved designs, which may make it more affordable to build considering the decreased time required in the project and the certainty known with meeting the regulations.
- One interviewee also recommended that a solution to the cost and construction barrier could be pre-paneled laneway suites, given that "pre-fab" would not work with the unique site contexts, and that this would help solve the issue of staging material.
- Recommendations were expressed around the City needing to be more creative with incentives to homeowners to undertake this development.
- Overall, most commented that the by-law is working as intended. Rather, it is the other restrictions around fire and emergency access, cost, construction and neighbour relations that significantly impact laneway suite development.
- An important aspect raised was that of sustainable design. One interviewee noted that a lot of clients who are the ones that can afford to build a laneway suite have a vested interest in having it as a resilient building, and therefore take on a more sustainable approach to building. However, the 6m height cap doesn't allow for, and having to go to the Committee of Adjustment to get more height adds another barrier. The interviewee hoped there was more leeway with this, especially considering the future and climate change.

Discussion

Laneway Suites are not viable as a tool for Poverty Reduction Strategy

Through the extensive mapping and interview processes that were undertaken, it was concluded that laneway suites do not serve as a viable tool for addressing the goals of the Poverty Reduction Strategy, specifically in relation to "housing stability" as laneway suites do not directly increase the supply of affordable housing. Of the 13 Priority Neighbourhoods identified in the 2013 Poverty Reduction Strategy, only 7 of the neighbourhoods have laneways. Within these 7 neighbourhoods, laneways only cover a total of approximately 8km. This means that of the total 295 km of public space covered by laneways in the City of Toronto, only 2.8% of this public space is located in Priority Neighbourhoods. Figure 11 shows the small portion of laneways that exist in the 2013 Priority Neighbourhoods.

In addition to the fact that laneways are not available for the vast majority of residential lots located in Priority Neighbourhoods, the interview process revealed that the costs associated with building a laneway suite are high. Interviewees shared that costs can range from $250-450 per sq ft, not including additional soft costs that may be required for legal representation, planning, or building code consultants. Although the City of Toronto has two programs aimed at making laneway suites an affordable housing typology (Development Charges Deferral Program for Ancillary Secondary Dwelling Units & Affordable Laneway Suites Program) most interviewees were unsure or did not believe that homeowners were utilizing the programs. One interviewee noted that they only knew of one client that had utilized the affordability program as they were well versed with the financial mechanisms required to achieve their financial goals relative to also maintaining average market rent. Another interviewee stated that to their knowledge, no one had used the City of Toronto programs as people looking for rental profits. However, the City of Toronto is in the process of developing a monitoring report and numbers on the use of the City's programs are expected to be included. It was also suggested that even if the programs were used, it would not make a significant difference to the affordability of building a laneway suite given how expensive they are to build. Ultimately, all barriers including; fire and emergency access, neighbour relations and LDAs, and construction logistics result in increased expenses and make laneway suites a large investment. As such, most professionals indicated that homeowners renting out laneway suites would likely seek market rate rent or above to see a return on their investment.

Both the limited availability of laneways in Priority Neighbourhoods and the cost barriers associated with developing suites led to the conclusion that laneway suites as a housing typology do not directly contribute to affordable housing in Toronto. As more laneway suites are built, rental pricing could be analyzed to further support or refute this conclusion in terms of affordable rental units. However, it should be noted that laneway suite development could support overall housing affordability in the City of Toronto indirectly by increasing housing stock and vacancy rates within existing residential neighbourhoods and, in turn, potentially lowering average rent. Furthermore, laneway suites can support some of the other recommendations of the Poverty Reduction Strategy such as job growth in the construction and development industries. The discussion around laneway suites and affordable housing also opens the door for conversations around other housing typologies, such as garden suites, that may better serve to address affordable housing.

Other recommendations offered by professionals to address cost-related barriers included: a new financing program currently in the works by CIBC, taking advantage of City owned lands such as the TCHC Scattered Housing Portfolio, building prefabricated "as of right" laneway suites, and the need for public-private partnerships.

Fire and emergency service access requirements restrict eligibility

The spatial analysis completed illustrates that the current fire and emergency service requirements outlined by the City of Toronto, in accordance to Ontario Building Code, greatly limit the City's potential to build new laneway housing. The analysis conducted revealed that just over 47,000

properties abut a laneway for a minimum of 3.5 metres, this number can be seen as the full potential in terms of laneway suite development within Toronto. Less than 28,000 properties meet the current fire and emergency service requirements; however, the updated requirements would allow for more than 36,000 lots to have laneway suites. This change would see a 30% increase in the number of eligible lots.

Interviews with industry professionals confirm that fire and emergency access is the largest barrier in the development process for laneway suites. Interviewees expressed frustrations around these rules, as there's been difficulty in obtaining information on why these measurements were used specifically for laneway suites based on the Building Code regulations. Interviewees also mentioned that these interpretations are more limiting than other areas of the Province, and that firefighting equipment in Toronto has not yet evolved to work with the City's increased density. Current restrictions not only reduce the number of lots that are eligible to have a laneway suite and they can also create a frustrating building process, which may discourage homeowners from wanting to build a laneway. If the proposed changes are approved it will increase the number of properties that can have a laneway suite, but it's unclear if the changes will alleviate any of the frustrations that come with building a laneway suite.

Delivering fire and emergency services in areas that feature narrow streets is possible, as demonstrated by cities in countries such as Japan and Italy. However, the City seems unwilling to update building requirements related to emergency services to support the city's, which then forces growth and planning to conform with existing, and outdated, requirements. Moving forward there are further changes to fire and emergency service requirements that the City could implement. While the proposed mitigating features of automatic sprinkling systems and passive protection help increase the distance up to 90 metres, other alternatives could be further explored, specifically ones that reduce the need for side access. For example, the City may want to incorporate smaller fire trucks that can operate in laneways into the Toronto Fire Service's fleet. Another change that could be beneficial is incorporating the use of aerial ladders when servicing a fire at a laneway suite.

The majority of successful permits for laneway suite development are linked to wider lots

The typology of properties with successful laneway suite building permit applications were analyzed to understand any commonalities between permit success and lot and housing type. Data related to successful building permits for laneway suite development were obtained from the building permit data from Open Data Toronto, specifically the data category "built or in progress". The main housing types related to the successful laneway suite permits are predominantly detached and semi-detached housing, as shown in Figure 14.

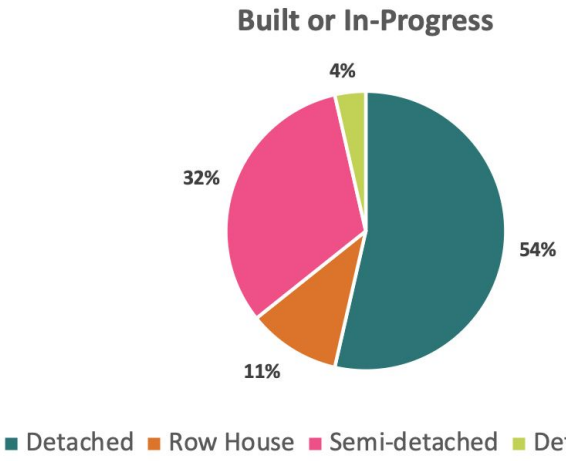


Figure 14 - Housing Type for Successful Building Permits for Laneway Suites, September 2020

As well, the spatial distribution of the housing types of successful laneway suite permits was analyzed by applying the same data mentioned in the previous paragraph to GIS. As shown in Figure 15, the successful permits are concentrated in the west-end of the City of Toronto, with a mixture of housing types per neighbourhood. The top five neighbourhoods for laneway suite buildings permits are outlined in green borders in Figure 15 and are further highlighted in Figure 16.

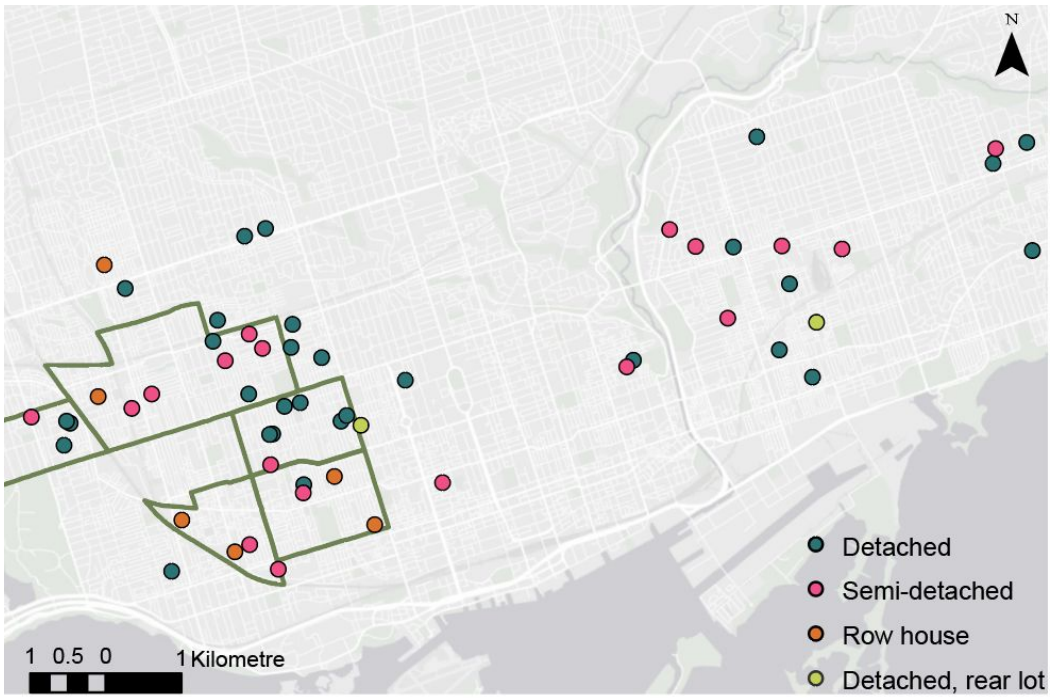


Figure 15 - Spatial distribution of housing type for successful building permits for laneway suites, September 2020.

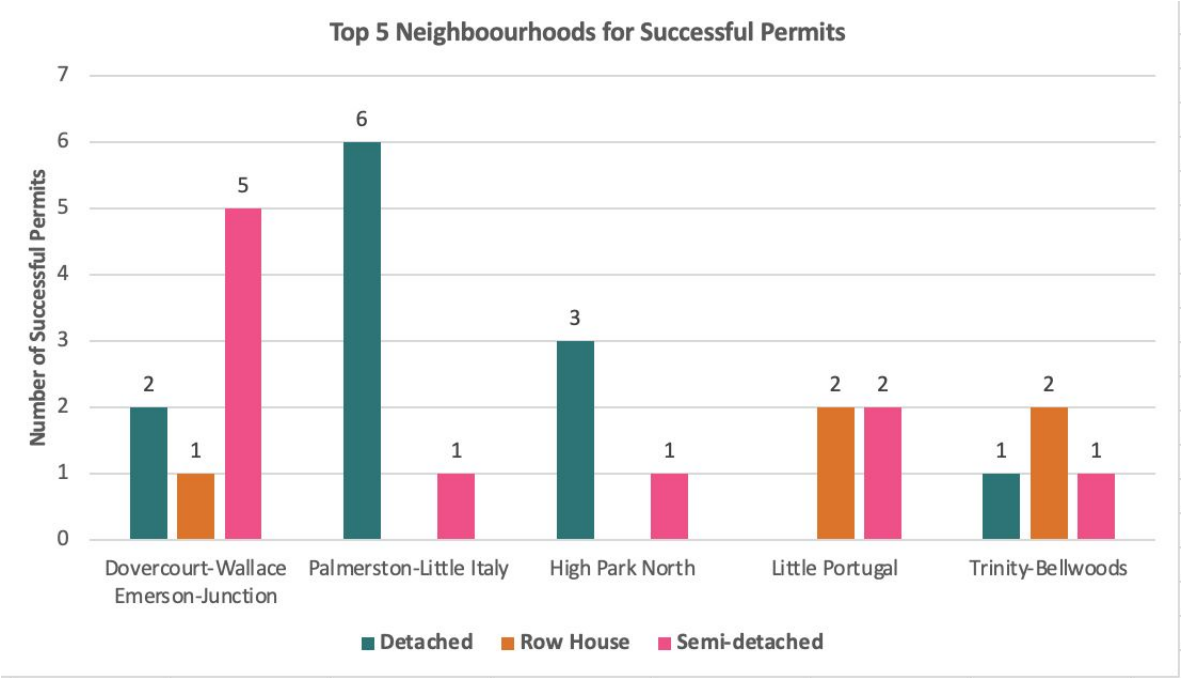


Figure 16 - Housing type of successful building permits for laneway suites in the top five eligible neighbourhoods, September 2020.

It is evident in Figure 16 that the dominant housing typology differs, more specifically in the dominance of semi-detached housing in Dovercourt-Wallace-Emerson-Junction (DWEJ) compared to the dominance of detached housing in Palmerston-Little Italy. To better understand the housing typologies of properties that make up the successful building permits for laneway suites as at September 2020 the length and width of all 56 properties were measured (Appendix 8). The average length and width per housing type for successful laneway suite building permits were calculated and arranged in Table 6 below.

Table 6. Average lot dimensions by housing type for successful laneway suite permits, September 2020.

	Average length (m)	Average width (m)
Detached (54%)	38.48	8.27
Semi-detached (32%)	38.41	6.38
Row Housing (11%)	35.98	5.09
Detached, rear lot (4%)	31.40	10.85

The average lot length and width of each housing type illustrates that although the housing types differ, the average length remains similar for the majority of successful applications to date and that it is perhaps width that plays a role in why detached housing dominates. Wider lots could improve the success rate of permit applications as neighbours may not have to share the 1 m unobstructed

path for fire and emergency service access requirements, and hence perhaps not need to execute a Limiting Distance Agreement. An area for further research could include measuring individual side access for each of these 56 properties to understand which successful permit properties were required to sign a Limiting Distance Agreement (LDA) or not. As well, based on the team's interview with Rodney Gill, Solicitor at the City of Toronto who is responsible for the LDA process for the entirety of the City, data is not tracked at the neighbourhood level for LDA for laneway suites specifically, given that LDA are widely used across the City for development. Therefore, further data tracking by the City of Toronto, at the neighbourhood level, specifically for LDA related to laneway suites, could be encouraged.

Neighbour Relations can be a Significant Challenge

Neighbour relationships can have an impact on the viability of laneway suit projects, largely through two mechanisms: Limiting Distance Agreement and the Minor Variance process.

There were instances when interviewees expressed some frustration that the solution to shared side yard access had to be so complex, and wondered at why a simpler agreement, such as a right of way agreement, wasn't able to be used. Mr. Gill, Solicitor at the City of Toronto, elaborated that the LDA is a necessary legal tool to ensure that the property owners proposing the laneway house have the property rights that will allow for continued fire service access to the laneway suite. For these LDA, the municipality is also a party to the agreement. If an easement was being considered to ensure fire access, while both parties to the easement would have to be acting in concert, the parties together could eliminate their easement agreement. However, in a LDA, having the municipality as a signatory keeps the agreement in place, regardless of any future changes in ownership.

As a tool, the LDA for laneway suites works as intended. However, while a LDA provides an avenue for property owners whose lots may otherwise have been disqualified due to a lack of necessary fire access requirements, it subsequently involves a neighbouring property owner directly in the proposed suites development process. While this is not necessarily negative, if a neighbouring property owner does refuse to sign an LDA when it is required, that action can amount to a 'veto' over the proposed project, even if the project meets all of the by-law requirements This level of uncertainty can be problematic, and the process of negotiating an LDA may cause delays and associated costs to development timelines. Additionally, as described to the team, issues with the LDA can occur once the project is already substantially underway. So the issues arising from LDAs are not necessarily a result of the tool themselves, but of the overarching regulations and interpretations that make them necessary in the first place, and the subsequent involvement of neighbouring property owners.

The project's findings suggest that an LDA presents a challenge to individuals largely because they are a 'new' tool in a new process, and directly involve property owners' homes. It was described to the Studio team numerous times that buying a home often represents a large, or the largest, investment an individual or family will make. Anything that might impact that investment, such as a

restriction on title like an LDA, can often be concerning. Additionally, the LDA is a complex legal document, and while the City has tried to streamline the process and provide as much general information as it is able to, including a template agreement with prompts with how to populate, seeking legal assistance for this process is likely to be necessary. It is important to note that the City cannot give property owners legal advice and does not have a role in mediating issues related to agreements on such private property rights.

It was acknowledged by interview participants that similar to the overall by-law and process, there is a newness to LDAs in this context, and that using this tool will get easier in time as the homeowner and professionals involved, including lenders, become more comfortable with its application.

Neighbour relations were also discussed with us in the context of when a proposed laneway suite project seeks a Minor Variance. If a specific site allows for it, a homeowner may be able to build a laneways suite as-of-right. However if a homeowner requires or seeks a minor variance, interviewees noted that this can 'open up' the project to neighbour opposition and potential appeals, creating uncertainty about timelines and costs.

General concerns that were mentioned by interviewees included the following:

- Homeowners wanting to protect their home as an asset, as it is likely the biggest investment one will ever make. They perceive the introduction of laneway suites near their home as a potential risk to this investment.
- Concerns were raised at Committee of Adjustment around having renters in the lane. This illustrates the perception of some homeowners towards introducing more rental stock in laneway suites in the areas where laneway suite development is currently taking place.
- Privacy concerns with the placement of windows looking directly onto neighbours backyards was also concerns that the interviewees noted were raised in projects worked on.

Overall, although fire and emergency access were the largest barrier to eligibility of lots, neighbour relations presented itself as a significant challenge that can stop projects from moving forward, in reference to the LDA program, or can add time and cost onto a project, resulting in homeowners potentially halting the development of their proposed laneway suite. There is a difficulty in advising on opportunities to increase positive neighbour relations, which in and of themselves are difficult to quantify. However, further plain language explanations about the LDA process, and promotion of the overall benefits that laneway suites can bring to a property, are steps that could be taken in the short term to address this issue. Additionally, attention could be drawn to the benefits of laneway suites not only as a feature that may increase an individual property's value, but to their potential to help shape the future of their neighbourhoods. The potential for laneway suites to catalyze increasing interest and investment in laneways could be promoted to property owners, as well as their potential to support laneways to become a thriving layer of the public realm that can create a high quality of space and life in these property owner's own communities

Social infrastructure and neighbourhood connectivity has the potential to contribute to the success of laneway suite development

The mapping data shows that neighbourhoods with high laneway suite potential also have available school capacity. This would indicate that there is room to accommodate families with children in new laneway housing stock. However, it remains to be seen whether families with school-aged children would be likely to inhabit laneway suites and thus, to what extent schools are a necessary amenity in terms of serving laneway suite development. This is a question for future research in the future when there is sufficient data to analyze. Libraries have also been shown to have available capacity in these same neighbourhoods. The services and programs at each branch differ substantially, however, this would indicate additional residents would not overburden local libraries. Neighbourhoods eligible for laneway suites in general can support increased density in terms of school and library capacity.

Parkland provision poses a challenge in realizing laneway suites' full potential. The COVID-19 pandemic has shown the importance of parkland to Toronto residents but significant portions of the neighbourhoods with the greatest potential for laneway development have been identified as Areas of Parkland Need. If new residences were to be added to these neighbourhoods it would further lower the parkland provision which could have negative impacts on the neighbourhoods' livability. This issue may be mitigated to some extent if, as part of streetscaping and beautification, additional greening of laneways or underused adjacent spaces can be achieved. The City could also invest in laneway streetscaping in tandem with private development to promote environmental sustainability through permeable paving and tree planting.

Walkability and connectivity are also important considerations, given that residents of laneway suites may not have access to private parking spaces for private vehicles and may be more likely to rely on public transportation and bicycle infrastructure. The majority of laneway neighbourhoods are located close to higher order transit, including subway or streetcar corridor. All of the laneways are well served by bus lines, which provides for good connectivity to the rest of the city. In terms of walkability, walk score is generally high in neighbourhoods closest to the downtown core and, in particular, the five neighbourhoods with the greatest laneway suite potential have walkability scores much greater than the city average. This indicates that new residents to the area would not necessarily have need of a private vehicle or parking space as they can access most amenities by foot or transit. Small interventions on the part of the City, such as creating openings in fencing around public parking lots, could further improve laneway connectivity and public safety. The City could also create more convenient pedestrian conditions by linking laneways to nearby parks, open spaces, and commercial zones as illustrated in Figure 17.

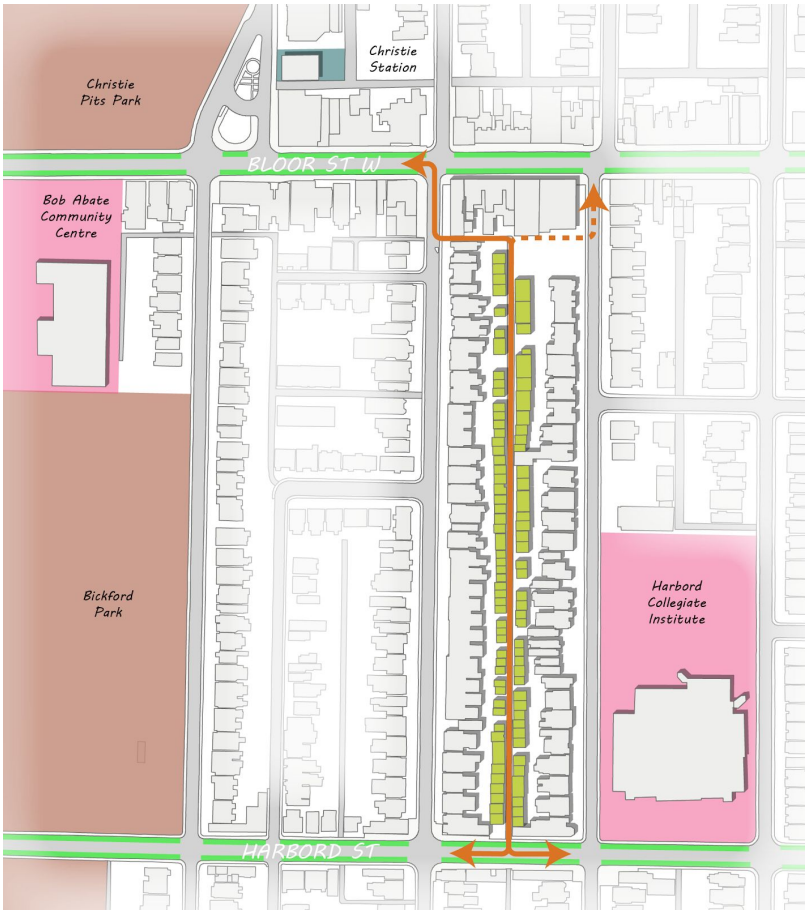


Figure 17. An illustration of the excellent connectivity of a laneway in the Palmerston - Little Italy neighbourhood.

The interview data does not point to social infrastructure as a particularly important factor in the decision to build a laneway suite. However, as professionals in the building and development sector, the interviewees are perhaps not best positioned to comment on the importance of social infrastructure for the success or incentivization of building laneway suites. Rather, surveys of the general public and of homeowners in areas with laneway suite potential could better confirm or refute the importance of schools, libraries, parkland, and other social amenities in development decisions. Further analysis of demographic trends in laneway neighbourhoods could also shed light on which of the things that laneways can do would be most appropriate for a given area. For instance, residents of the Corso Italia - Davenport neighbourhood, which has a relatively higher proportion of citizens over the age of 55 than other laneway neighbourhoods, may be an area in which the ageing in place argument would be the most appropriate for convincing homeowners to build suites.

Conclusion

The City of Toronto has seen an increased interest in laneway suites since introducing them as a permitted housing type. However, when compared to the first three years of uptake in other

Canadian cities such as Vancouver, it is apparent that Toronto's uptake has been relatively low. Vancouver introduced laneway suites in 2009 and only a handful of laneway suite building permits were issued in the first year (18 in total). However, the number of permits issued increased more than 10 times in the second year, and now an average of 350 permits are issued each year, with a high of 709 permits issued in 2018 (Housing Vancouver, 2020). Toronto has experienced increased interest in laneway suites, but nowhere near that of Vancouver (see Fig. 17).

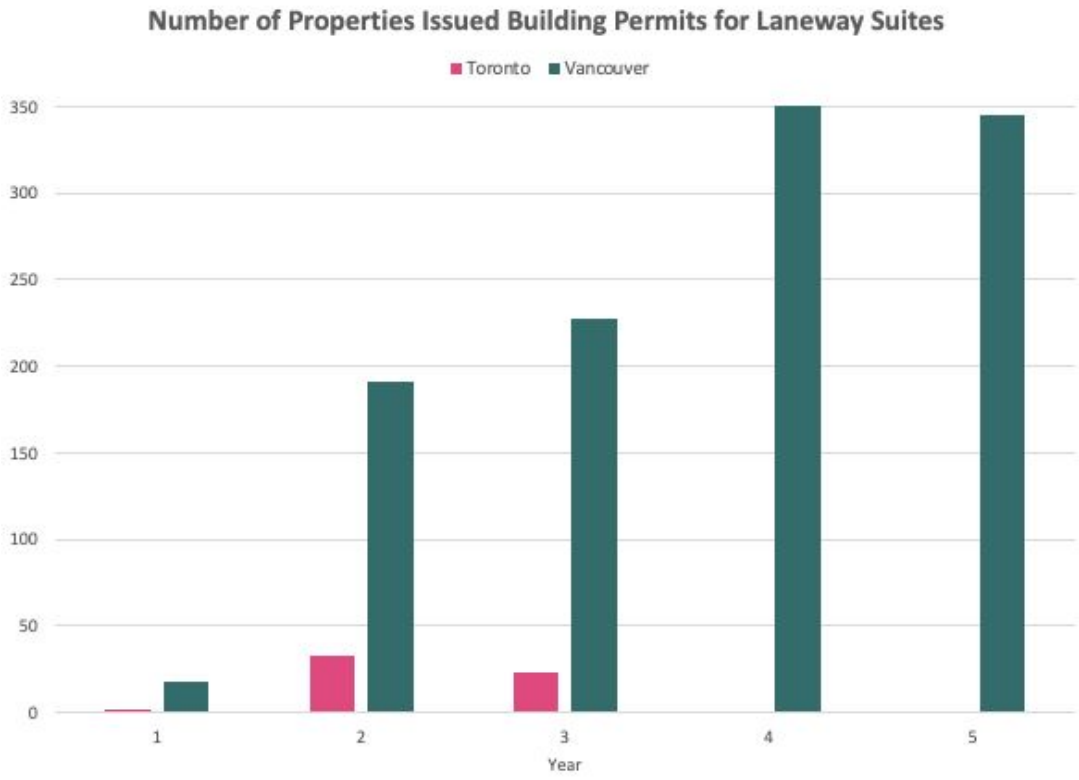


Figure 17. A comparison between Toronto (2018-2020, as of September) and Vancouver (2009-2013) of the number of properties issued building permits for laneway suites. Note, the number of permits issued under Toronto's third year of laneway housing is subject to increase as it is the number of permits issued between January-September, and therefore may increase by year's end.

Recommendations

Several interviewees noted that the legislation surrounding, as well as the process of developing, laneway suites is relatively new. Interviewees further suggested that it is likely to take some time for property owners and service providers to become accustomed to the intricacies of laneway suite development. Based on the research documented in this report, we have identified a series of actions that can be taken to increase the development of laneway suites in Toronto, as outlined below. The recommendations are divided into short term, medium term and long term actions based on their ease of implementation.

Short Term

- Investigate the evolution of related jurisdictions' fire and emergency services access requirements with respect to laneway suites, garden suites, or other accessory unit types to understand how more densely populated areas with these housing typologies adjusted service requirements to allow for increased eligibility of lots. An example given by interviewees is the City of Hamilton's purchase of an 'urban engine', a fire truck specially designed to be used in the more densely populated areas of the city.

- Explore and implement alternative fire and emergency service compliance options that mitigate the need for shared side yard access to laneway suites.

- Collect and organize a record of LDAs, specifically denoting their use for laneway suites, to further understand the relationships between lot dimensions, LDAs, and successful building permits.

- Provide comprehensive, centralized information about laneway suite development that is geared towards homeowners. For example, the City of Vancouver provides a dedicated "Laneway Housing How-To Guide" geared towards the public.

- Conduct a survey of property owners in the areas with the highest number of eligible lots to better understand:
    - motivating and deterring factors for laneway suite development;
    - perceptions of existing/potential laneway suites in their neighbourhood; and,
    - if a laneway suite has already been built by a property owner, its current uses, rental rate (if applicable), and the property owner's experience with the development process.

- Actively collect data on the use of the '*Development Charges (DC) Deferral Program for Ancillary Secondary Dwelling Units'* and *'The Affordable Laneway Suites Pilot Program'*.

Medium Term

- Analyze which neighbourhoods may be most suitable for uptake of garden suites by applying a similar eligibility analysis as discussed above, to understand what lots are eligible based on fire and emergency access requirements and the potential impact on surrounding social infrastructure.

- Explore the option for professional property management services for laneway suites, to facilitate an avenue for homeowners to create rental units without the requirement of acting as a landlord.

- Collect demographic data on residents occupying laneway suites to better understand the potential demand on surrounding social infrastructure.

- Conduct public outreach and engagement regarding the benefit of laneway suites for individuals and communities, as a counterpoint to potential negative perceptions of laneway suites and their occupants.'.

- Explore further financing options for laneway suite, both to promote general development as well as affordability goals (if desired).

Long Term

- Investigate the potential for commercial activity in laneways in Toronto to create complete communities.

- Collect data on the average rental prices of laneway suites to better understand their place in the rental stock and whether they are supporting affordable housing goals.

- Investigate the potential for laneway suite pilot projects on eligible properties that are a part of City or TCHC portfolios.

Appendices

See separate folder.

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