Ground Level Strategies for Neighbourhood Investment:
Lessons from Three Toronto Neighbourhoods

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Putting Theory into Practice: Asset Mapping in Three Toronto Neighbourhoods

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Project Focus

- Focused on neighbourhood capacity and assets, access to infrastructure and indicators of neighbourhood vitality
- Tested tools and frameworks in three Toronto neighbourhoods
  - Henry Farm
  - Roncesvalles
  - Woburn

Figure 1: Mapping Community Assets Framework

Barrier Conditions
- Inaccessibility, unsuitability
- Undeveloped leadership
- Lack of resources
- Negative perceptions
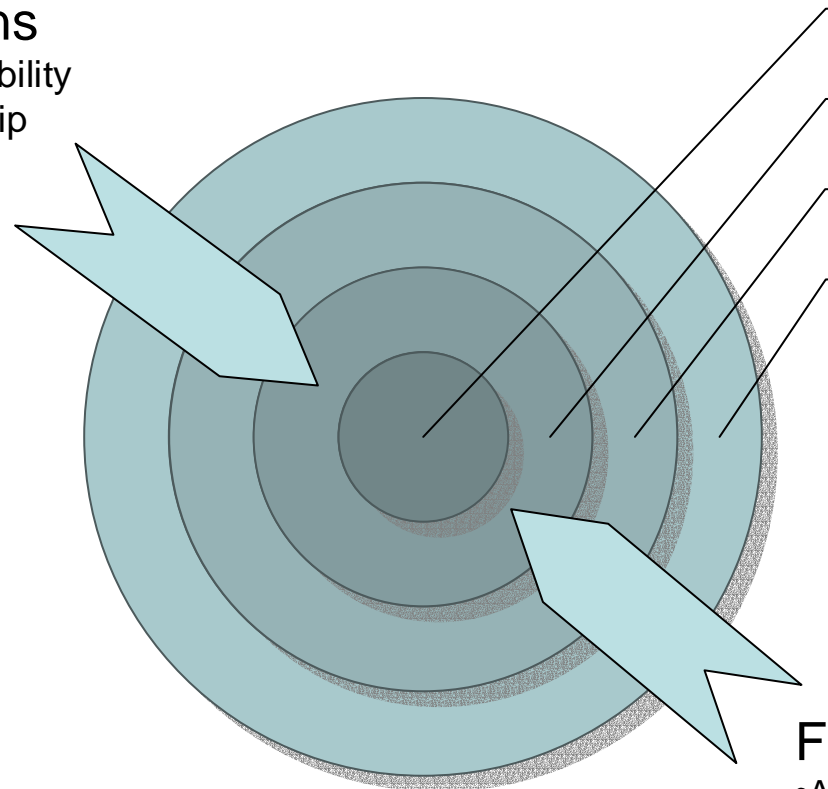
Resident Assets

Neighbourhood Assets
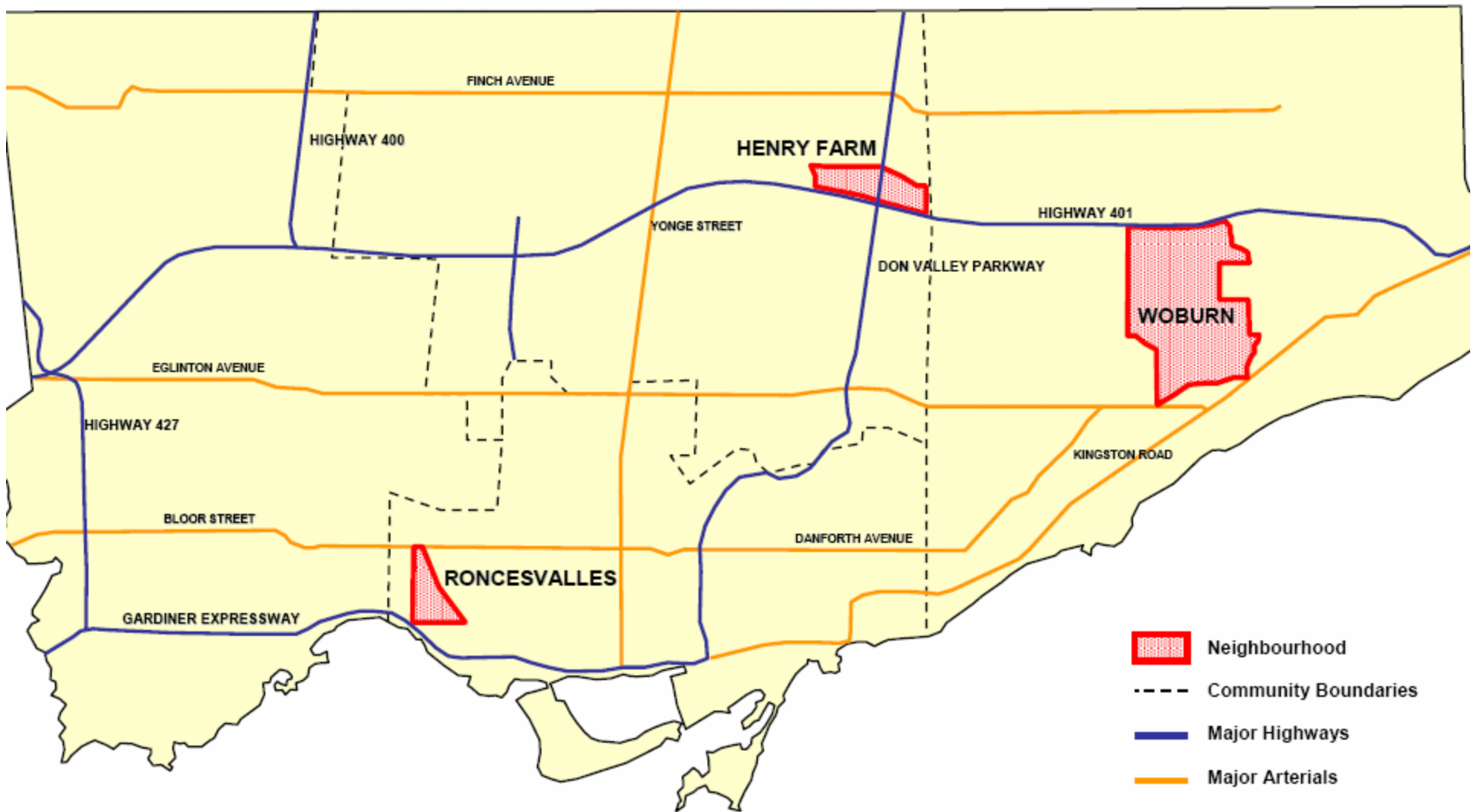
Broader Community Assets

External Assets (citywide agencies, municipal/ provincial/federal agencies and resources)

Facilitating Conditions
- Accessibility, suitability
- Community leadership
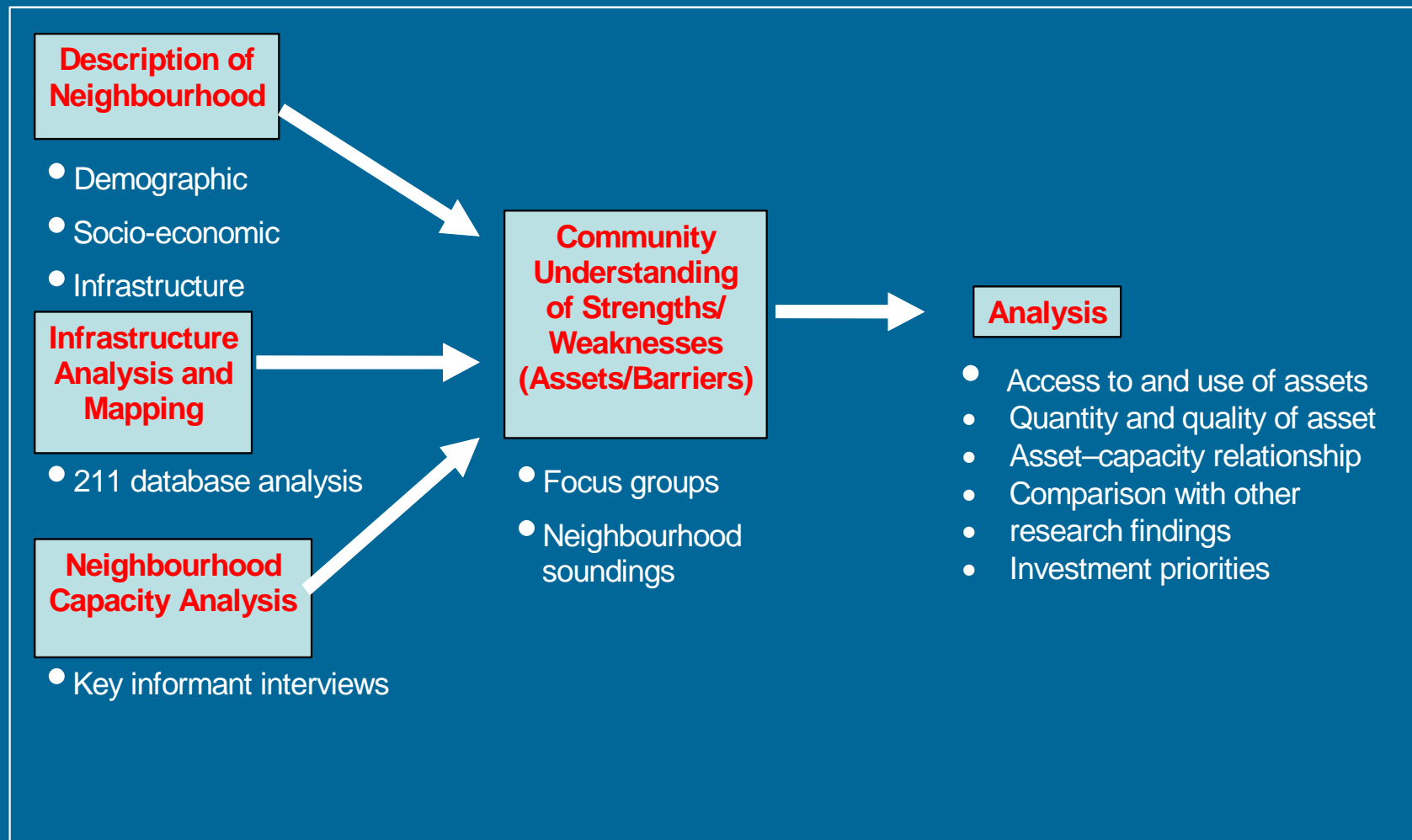- Presence of resources
- Positive perceptions

An asset is a person, physical structure or place, business, service or other accessible resource used by local residents for their personal, social, economic or cultural benefit.

1: THREE NEIGHBOURHOODS IN THE CITY OF TORONTO

FINCH AVENUE

HIGHWAY 400

HENRY FARM

YONGE STREET

HIGHWAY 401

DON VALLEY PARKWAY

WOBURN

EGLINTON AVENUE

HIGHWAY 427

KINGSTON ROAD

BLOOR STREET

DANFORTH AVENUE

RONCESVALLES

GARDINER EXPRESSWAY

Neighbourhood

Community Boundaries

Major Highways

Major Arterials

O SCALE

Research Process

Description of Neighbourhood

- Demographic
- Socio-economic
- Infrastructure

Infrastructure Analysis and Mapping

- 211 database analysis

Neighbourhood Capacity Analysis

- Key informant interviews

Community Understanding of Strengths/ Weaknesses (Assets/Barriers)

- Focus groups
- Neighbourhood soundings

Analysis

- Access to and use of assets
- Quantity and quality of asset
- Asset–capacity relationship
- Comparison with other research findings
- Investment priorities

Findings

- Neighbourhood?
- Strengths and Weaknesses
- Measures of Neighbourhood Vitality
- Investment Priorities
    - Public Spaces and Places
    - Supporting Neighbourhood Voices
- Economic Limits of Neighbourhoods

Strategies for Investing in Neighbourhoods

Strategy #1 Defining Neighbourhoods

- Historical identification
- Natural, structural or physical boundaries
- Common identification and experiences
- Commonly used facilities, centres or landmarks
- Administrative and political boundaries

Strategy #2 Selecting Neighbourhoods for Investment

- **Measures of Neighbourhood Vitality developed through other Strong Neighbourhoods research**
  - 6 Domains with a total of 15 measures:
    - Economy
    - Education
    - Urban Fabric
    - Health
    - Demographics
    - Safety

Strategy #3 Understanding Neighbourhoods

- **Asset Mapping Process**
  - Asset Assessment – 5 broad categories of assets:
    - Physical, social, diversity-related, service and safety and mobility
  - Physical Maps of neighbourhood assets
  - Formal and Informal assets

Strategy #4 Investing in Neighbourhoods

Five Types of Neighbourhood Assets

- Physical Assets

- Social Assets

- Diversity related Assets

- Service Assets

- Safety and Mobility Assets

Five Asset Measures

- Availability
- Proximity
- Access
- Capacity
- Quality

Analysis of Facilitating and Barrier Conditions to Use of Neighbourhood Assets

Asset Variables	Use of Assets	
	Facilitating Conditions	**Barrier Conditions**
Availability	•Present •Planned/developing	•Absent •Lost (e.g., cut, relocated)
Proximity	•Within neighbourhood •Reasonably close (depends on users) •Good transportation to asset	•Natural or other physical barriers •Not easily accessible – roads, transit •Not close to neighbourhood users
Accessibility	•No/low user fees or equipment/participation fees •Promotion/outreach to potential users •No/limited wait times •No eligibility requirements •Appropriate hours of operation	•User fees/no subsidies •Restrictive eligibility •Limited hours of operation •Long waiting lists
Capacity	•Not at full capacity all the time •Well maintained physical conditions •Adequately staffed •Appropriate use of volunteers Continuous and stable program funding	•Always over capacity •Underfunded •State of disrepair •Understaffed •Over-reliance on volunteers
Quality	•Responsive to users •Culturally based or sensitive •Multilingual and multicultural •Adaptive modes of service/support •Appropriate expertise and skill base	•Language and culture barriers •Rigid/inflexible modes of service •Underskilled staff

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Lessons from Work in Three Toronto Neighbourhoods

Lesson #1 Neighbourhood Process

- Quantitative AND Qualitative
- Types of data and levels of analysis
- Tools
- Broad Outreach and Engagement

Lesson #2 Limits of Neighbourhoods

- **Economic and social limits of neighbourhoods**

  - Basic needs foundation
  - Broad social and economic policy foundation
  - Core infrastructure foundation

Lesson #3 Investment in Neighbourhoods

- **Types of Infrastructure Investments**

    - Core foundational assets
    - Neighbourhood capacity
    - Service investments
    - Physical infrastructure investments

Lesson #4 Investment Roles

- **Distinct but important roles**
  - Basic needs
  - Supportive policy and program frameworks Support to neighbourhoods – infrastructure
  - Support to neighbourhoods – capacity and services
  - Physical space and infrastructure in neighbourhoods

Conclusions

- Strong, diverse neighbourhoods – good and bad?
- Jurisdictional and role issues
- Complex issue
- Need different responses
- Need strong foundation for local responses
- Hard work

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