



# The Pocket Post

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## Updates

- On July 26<sup>th</sup>, City Councillor Paula Fletcher wrote Chatham Avenue residents asking for comments on the proposed Chatham Avenue contraflow bike lane. Timing of installation is not yet known.
- In order to fix erosion at the east end of Shudell, the TTC is redesigning access to the greenspace. Construction is expected to begin soon.
- The City is reconstructing the roadway, sidewalks and water service on Queen Victoria after Labour Day weekend. Councillor Fletcher's office has additional information.

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## Pocket 2016 Town Hall - Our Evolving Community

A crowd of about 45 Pocketeers gathered at Eastern Commerce Collegiate on May 31<sup>st</sup> to discuss the ongoing evolution of our community – the transformation of Eastern Commerce and a study of Danforth Avenue. We were also given a tour of the Toronto District School Board (TDSB) Museum and Archives currently housed at Eastern, as well as a visit to the Indigenous art gallery led by curator and Elder Dr. Duke Redbird.

### ***Transformation of Eastern Commerce***

By Fall 2017, the Pocket may be welcoming a new school to the neighbourhood. If plans proceed, the TDSB will convert Eastern into Toronto's first Kindergarten-to-Grade 12 Indigenous school and a centre of Indigenous educational excellence. If not, other options for use of the school building may also be considered.

Kindergarten to Grade 8 students would register in Fall 2017 (relocating from the First Nations Junior and Senior School of Toronto on Dundas East) and the school would expand by one grade a year until it reaches projected enrollment of about 600 students across the whole K-12 spectrum. The school would also host the Aboriginal Education Centre (to be relocated from Brockton High School). Eastern would continue to be home to the TDSB Museum and Archives, and would likely also retain the Creative Preschool of Eastern Toronto.

An Indigenous-focused school would allow students to learn about Indigenous cultures and contributions – and could include space for drumming and smudge ceremonies, green space for nature study and appropriate spaces for learning. Parents have asked for such a school and the recent Truth and Reconciliation Commission made a number of related recommendations to address tremendous damage done to Indigenous communities as a result of residential schools run or authorized by Canadian governments. Approximately 80,000 people from more than 60 First Nations reside in Toronto – and that population is young and growing.

Community members at the town hall were supportive of the school concept. However, the project hinges on the TDSB finding funds to Indigenize and refurbish the space. According to a July 13, 2016 Toronto Star article, there are no guarantees that the project will proceed as planned. Various alternatives for use of the property have been suggested (e.g., the French Board or Catholic Board taking over Eastern). Once more information is available, the Pocket Community Association will work with the TDSB to host another community meeting at the school.

### ***Preparing for an Avenue Study of the Danforth – Broadview to Coxwell***

The City of Toronto's Planning Division is currently undertaking an Avenue study of Danforth from Coxwell to Victoria Park. Danforth East Community Association (DECA) representative Stephen Wickens described the study, told us that a study of Danforth from Broadview to Coxwell is planned for 2018, and advised Pocket residents to start their preparations to participate.

"Avenues" are important corridors along major streets where re-urbanization is anticipated and encouraged – to create new housing and job opportunities while improving the pedestrian environment, the look of the street, shopping opportunities and transit service for community residents.

Danforth Avenue is identified as an Avenue in the Toronto Official Plan. It is experiencing some development interest (e.g., at Danforth and Greenwood); there are

other attributes; and the Avenue needs a local framework to guide and manage growth.

Wickens outlined DECA's priorities for Danforth, which focus on revitalization, safety and fullness (i.e., no empty storefronts) and include:

- Become a destination again instead of simply a thoroughfare
- Provide employment
- Rebalance transportation
- Create real guidelines for development
- Emphasize public spaces (e.g., parks, squares, markets)

Wickens advised Pocket residents to establish a visioning committee and identify a short list of our own priorities so we are ready when the Avenue study for the Broadview to Coxwell section begins. He also noted that renowned urban thinker Jane Jacobs was surprised by how Danforth changed east of Pape Avenue, urging us to think about our vision for this stretch of Danforth and to share the vision with other affected community and business associations.

No plans have been made yet for follow-up on the Avenue study, but information will be shared as it becomes available.

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## **The Oakvale Green and Community Gardens:**

### **10 Years On** "They (almost) paved paradise and put up a parking lot."

Newer residents of the Pocket may not be aware of the storied history of the lovely patch of vegetable garden, orchard, and meadow that make up the Oakvale Green.

The Oakvale Green is located at the north-east end of the green space that separates the Pocket from the TTC Greenwood subway yard to the east. Some 24 years ago that property, which is owned by the TTC, was slated to become a parking lot for 250 cars – ironically, to provide parking for TTC employees working at the yards.

It was just one week after Nicholas Brooks and his wife Kathryn had moved into their house on Oakvale Avenue that two TTC employees came round the street informing the residents that their peaceful avenue was about to become a lot busier than they had anticipated. Some local residents were resigned to the outcome. Nicholas was not.

"I can be difficult when I get angry", Nicholas confides, "very difficult." He acknowledges that it rubs some people the wrong way, "but it's because I care a lot about this. And because it seems to work."

To his credit and to the benefit of the neighbourhood, that approach did work. Nicholas channeled his anger into forming a residents association, OKRA – the Oakvale Residents Association – and proceeded to engage in a drawn out battle with the TTC over its plans. Among other tactics, Nicholas pointed out that emptying a 250 space parking lot after a shift, along the single exit route, would create a traffic jam lasting several hours.

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proper zoning for a parking lot (it was, fittingly, zoned for greenhouses) and that they were proceeding on an “as of right” basis. The City’s Committee of Adjustment finally decided the issue in favour of OKRA, forcing the TTC to negotiate a lower number of parking spaces (65) and, as part of the compromise, create a green space on the balance of the property (and provide water for it from the TTC’s facility). In 2006, that green space formally became the Oakvale Green.

While Nicholas was focused on defeating the TTC’s parking lot plans, his wife Kathryn conceived of the plan to turn part of the green into a community garden. The first eight plots were duly created. Expanded in 2009, it now provides 32 plots rented out at cost plus six hours of labour towards the upkeep of communal areas, such as the copse of young apple and pear trees. Including children, about 65 people from the neighbourhood are involved in the cultivation of the gardens.

Kathryn, who had also overseen the administration of the gardens, developed cancer in 2014 and died eight months later. A Japanese maple was planted in a shaded recess of the gardens in her honour. From its vantage point, the decorative maple overlooks the verdant lettuces, ripening tomatoes, abundant kale and sweet corn of the carefully tended garden plots. Through the stand of maturing trees on the south side, the corner of the parking lot is barely visible.

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## **Upcoming Activities**

### *13<sup>th</sup> Annual Pocket Party and Car Free Day*

Saturday, September 24 – 2 pm to 11 pm

Phin Park and upper Condor Avenue – visit [thepocket.ca](http://thepocket.ca) for more information

### *Meeting to Revitalize the Pocket Newsletter*

Thursday, Sept. 29 – time 7:30 pm

1 Queen Victoria Street

We invite interested volunteers and writers to help get the next issue underway.

RSVP [marcvanb@sympatico.ca](mailto:marcvanb@sympatico.ca)

### *St. John Ambulance First Aid Training for the Pocket*

Saturday, Fall 2016 – date TBD

Have you ever wanted to take first aid training or update previously-learned skills? The Pocket Community Association is pleased to sponsor a day of emergency first aid training, including CPR and use of defibrillators.

*Subsidized cost - \$50 per person for PCA members. Sign-up information will be available at the Pocket Party and online in September.*

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