

## **Proposal For The Common Space**

**Date:** September 30, 2020

**To:** City Council, City Hall, City of Toronto

**From:** Anti-Planning City Division

**Wards:** ALL

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### **SUMMARY**

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The report presents conclusions and recommendations of the Citizen's Committee for the Commons Space (CCCS).

In July 2020, City Planning was approached by the community, in consultation with Marxists, who undertook the Proposal to the Commons Space, a policy proposal, bellwether and quasi-manifesto. The work included a programmatic rejection of the planning mentality, neoliberal retrenchment, colonial governance and submission to the forces of economic globalization.

The purpose of the CCCS is to provide strategic direction into the decolonization and anti-corporatization of municipal governance and the reorientation of city administration toward new democratic potentials rooted in community self-determination and widespread democratic engagement in the form of the Commons. The CCCS establishes the vision, guiding principles and framework recommendations for the commons space. To ensure the commons space is long-lasting, functional, dynamic, sustainable, beautiful and not cowed by external forces, the plan includes implementation, maintenance and conservation philosophies, including existing models available, to support the commons. It reflects the aspirations of local communities, the global importance of decolonial governance projects, and current and emerging understandings of legal common property models. See Attachment 1: Proposal for the Commons Space – Executive Summary.

Revised vision and anti-planning framework.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

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The Anti-Planning City Division recommends that City Council:

1. City Council direct the Director, Arts and Culture Services, Economic Development and Culture to circulate the "Proposal for the Commons Space" to all City Divisions, Boards and Agencies including the Toronto Transit Commission, working on capital projects in the City of Toronto.

2. City Council approve the “Proposal for the Commons Space “ and endorse the use of this document by all City Divisions, Boards and Agencies when reviewing public space in the City of Toronto, in order to, over time, enhance the public realm with high quality public engagement in support of the right to the city.
3. City Council endorse the implementation of the Priority Projects Plan (Figure 3) and Priority Projects Matrix (Table 1) identified in the “Proposal for the Commons Space - Praxis” document.
4. City Council direct the Chief Planner and Executive Director, City Planning to establish a network of Commons in the City of Toronto to ensure that public involvement and participation in the making of public space is representative of the city’s diverse multicultural community.

## **FINANCIAL IMPACT**

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The recommendations in this report will appropriate space and remove designated commons spaces from the market.

Future financial impacts of ceding control of public assets, such as parks, community and cultural centres, and others, to their communities are seismic.

## **COMMENTS/CREDO**

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Do not remove people from the places they live. Do not empty the encampments, our dwellings. Do not push people out, especially when there is nowhere to go. Do not evict us.

Totalitarian illusions of control and safety are not welcome in the delicious anarchy of the living city. No justice, no peace. Promote justice, find peace.

Do not evict people in order to build community-free condos. Let us occupy, let us inhabit, let us appropriate. There is no value in evacuating lived-in places and letting real relations get substituted with dead open spaces.

Do not do siege in our city, to our people, for the appearance of prosperity. If a community is in pain, look to its source to heal its people. Don’t criminalize them through the space, disdain their presence for living systemic inequity. Since when does loitering, or sleeping in public places, harm anyone? It doesn’t. It threatens property; the security guards that secure them are just police by another name.

Let the public find itself in the city.

Let people sit on curbs, or the street if we like, without the scrutiny of police.

Let people sleep, let us talk together, let us play, let us be like high school students eating lunch in the hallways, let us talk like neighbours.

Let people appropriate nonplaces, empty places, and challenge the vacancy of open spaces and the vacancy caused by the financialization of the global real estate market.

Let the designs of the city be unafraid of gatherings, or, let the gatherings and flows of life design the city.

Let people carve poems into the city like a river into rock.

## **PROPOSAL FOR THE COMMON SPACE**

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The Proposal for the Commons Space radically displaces the City of Toronto Corporation's Official Plan. This document will serve as a provocative and disruptive guide in galvanizing the community to consider the Commons as a model for inhabiting and living in the city.

The consultants' final report is available on the Anti-Planning web page at: <https://www.tkaronto.ca/city-government/planning-development/planning-studies-initiatives/proposal-for-the-commons-space/>. The Proposal for the Commons Space provides an extensive overview and analysis of commons space and its response to crises of capitalism, colonialism, economic globalization, and neoliberalism.

## **CONCLUSIONS/QUESTIONS**

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- When did cities begin to market themselves as places for people instead of places for industry?
- When did the city become a place to be, to visit, to live, instead of just a place to extract labour power?

## **FURTHER READING**

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- Webb, Dan. *Critical Urban Theory, Common Property, and "the Political": Desire and Drive in the City*. New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2017.

## **ATTACHMENTS**

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Attachment 1: Proposal for the Commons Space.

# PROPOSAL FOR THE COMMONS MASTER PLAN



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PROPOSAL FOR THE COMMONS  
SEPTEMBER 30, 2020  
FINAL REPORT

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

“This process of commons-based experimentalism re-conceptualizes urban governance along the same lines as the right to the city, creating a juridical framework for city rights. Through collaborative, polycentric governance-based experiments we can see the right to the city framework be partially realized – eg. the right to be part of the creation of the city, the right to be part of the decision-making processes shaping the lives of city inhabitants, and the right of inhabitants to shape decisions about the collective resources in which all urban inhabitants have a stake.”

- Sheila Foster, [“The Co-City: From the Tragedy to the Comedy of the Urban Commons”](#)

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### CONTEXTUAL BACKGROUND

The framework for the project is articulated in a range of existing scholarship, including David Bollier’s *Think Like a Commoner: A Short Introduction to the Life of the Commons* (2014), David Harvey’s *Rebel Cities: from the Right to the City to the Urban Revolution* (2012), Gerald E. Frug’s *City Making: Building Communities without Building Walls* (2001), Don Mitchell’s *Right to the City: Social Justice and the Fight for Public Space* (2003), and Henri Lefebvre’s *The Right to the City* (1996), Peter Linebaugh’s *The Magna Carta Manifesto: Liberties and Commons for All* (2008), and others.

As Foster and Iaione (2016, p.285) highlight, thinking about the commons is a key component in opening up the possibility of more inclusive and equitable forms of “city-making”. “The commons has the potential to highlight the question of how cities govern or manage resources to which city inhabitants can lay claim to them as common goods, without privatizing them or exercising monopolistic public regulatory control over them.”  
MMARY

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### A LIVING DOCUMENT

The CCCS’s Proposal for the Commons Space is intended to be a living document that will evolve in accordance with changes in critical policy studies and Marxist urban studies, to be updated regularly. The implementation of the Commons within Toronto will play a vital place-keeping role and further contribute to the distinct character of the City of Toronto.



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# PROPOSAL FOR THE COMMONS MASTER PLAN

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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## PROPOSAL FOR THE COMMONS MASTER PLAN

### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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#### PURPOSE: DISRUPT THE POLITICAL IMAGINARY

This initiative is an invitation to the people of Toronto to utilize City Hall in a way that enables the Commons to manifest harmoniously and cause a mutation of municipal governance from within.

The Commons is a way of approaching the management of collective resources and a means to the creation of an egalitarian and cooperative society. What a concept of the commons can do, legally and conceptually, is establish a spatial framework for preserving socially produced goods and treat them as essential to sustaining the vitality of cities as water and air.

By situating the idea of the Commons within City Hall itself this project envisions the diffusion and dissemination of the concept to the Commons across the city. The goal is to infuse the idea of the Commons into future approaches to local governance. This project seeks to redistribute the capacities of municipal government and bureaucracy to communities and steadily freeing property from both “public” and “private” control, such that it becomes understood as common space.

In this model, responsibilities over shared community assets will be assumed by communities according to principles of self-determination and self-government.

The concept of the Commons is intended to reconfigure the governance of the city to emphasize an understanding of the city (1) as a type of commons, a shared, collective resource, and (2) as containing multiple commons spaces, which offer opportunities for local communities to work towards a concept of spatial justice. This means using city government to contribute to the dismantling of private property as a system, corporate oligarchy over space and collective life, and finally dissolve the relations which reproduce forms of exploitation rooted in colonialism, economic globalization, and neoliberalism.



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## PROPOSAL FOR THE COMMONS MASTER PLAN

### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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#### GUIDING QUESTIONS

- What is it to think of the city as a type of Commons that its inhabitants are entitled to shape and inhabit?
- What can an enlarged vision of the commons offer Toronto's people?
- How can Toronto's people create common spaces for community and meaningful collaboration with one another?
- How can a dual concept of the commons help a city's people thrive?
- What kind of shared infrastructure might enhance people's sense of enfranchisement in relation to the city, their community, and stake in the future?

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According to, Silvia Federici and George Caffentzis (2014, p. i101) commons spaces are autonomous spaces that operate as tools for people to “reclaim control over the conditions of ... reproduction, and as bases from which to counter the processes of enclosure and increasingly disentangle our lives from the market and the state.”

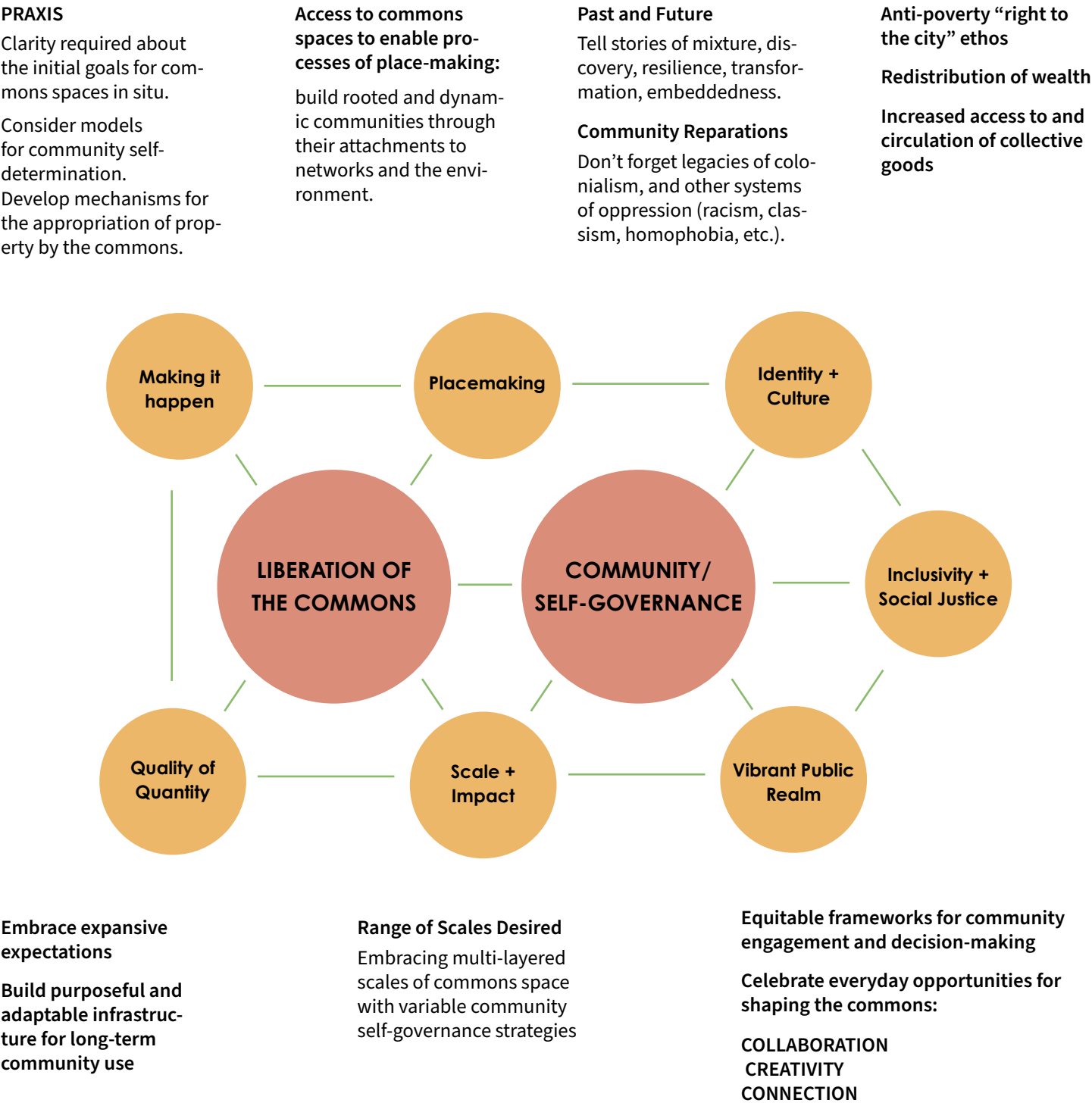
This project began with a question, which produced iterative results: What is it to think of the city as a type of Commons that its inhabitants are entitled to shape and inhabit?

There is no longer any good reason to treat City Hall like the castle at the centre of a fiefdom. It cannot be a separate place from the city, like a corporate abstraction itself, held together virtually with a cascade of slide decks.

This is an opportunity to imagine and then realize the nonterritorial democratization of power to dismantle the state as such. This is a geography of insurrection, a plan to disrupt the state-centric political imaginary which systematically prioritizes capital over the people and the environment.

COMMONS ADVISORY COMMITTEE AND COMMUNITY DISSEMINATION

Figure 1. CORE PLATFORM - Highlights the key nodes of the Commons Space



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### THE ROLE OF COMMONS IN PEACEKEEPING

The Commons is a component of the supra-public realm and should contribute in meaningful ways to the experience of city living. The commons should aim to contribute to shared experiences of place and community, strengthen connections to the past and create visions for the future, improve the quality of life by producing experiences unmediated by private market-relations and public management.

“There is a collective yearning for *communitas* and a sense of the sacred that would transcend or, as Ursula Le Guin quotes from Moore’s *Utopie*, that ‘dissolves the norms that govern structured or institutionalized relationships and is accompanied by experiences of unprecedented potency’”.

- Jayne Engle – [Sacred Civics](#)

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#### INTRODUCING THE COMMONS

In the space of a city, it is possible to realise a future with a re-invigorated sense of the commons, and all the benefits in the term. A Commons is democratic; a Commons is collective. The Commons relates to shared ownership and a shared destiny. It relates to the shared community good of pooling resources, so that the act of coming together itself becomes the resource: generative, creative, and open.

As a space, the Commons is a place to gather, a place to collect, a meeting place. What is held in common is not claimed by any one person or any single entity, so this space is not up for appropriation or possession by any single person or corporate body. It is simply held in common with others. It is not available for any single use. It must be collectively managed in a way that allows it to be constantly transformed, active, and rejuvenated.

The Commons is a place to come and be. Common ground.

Prejudices about “the tragedy of the commons” are no longer persuasive. It is a fundamentally capitalist worldview that imagines space as either a resource for exploitation or a place for exchange. We should not take the extractive logics of capitalism as a model for our human lives.

They are not the way people have to live together on this earth. This worldview has no place for gifts, collaboration, conservation, regeneration, or simply flourishing – it simply excludes the possibility of imagining that people can operate in these ways.

The resource management of the Canadian state, its tools of private property and its liberal political economic imaginary, have shown that the State is not interested in protecting against the over-consumption of resources, the degradation of the environment, the insecurity of labour and vulnerable populations. It is time to consider new models for bringing about new perspectives on city governance rooted in the democratic potential of the commons: self-governance, self-determination, collective ownership and management of resources, radical accountability to place (community and the environment).

The premise of the Commons introduced here rejects this impoverished and misanthropic attitude to the way people relate to one another: collectively insatiable, opportunistic, and live in a state of competition and scarcity. This does not have to be so. Look at the way corporations compete against one another, compete to be the most efficient in their modes of exploitation and extraction.

Look at the way they pillage the earth and cannibalize their workers! Now consider how community can support collaboration and how it can sustain, share, and create.

Here, we flip the script and start by thinking about the joy of being in common, that is, being together with people and recognizing our deep affiliation with one other. The comedy of the commons dares us to imagine being in a convivial space, enjoying the mixture and sociability of that relationship. This perspective sees that there can be value in coming together in a specific place. It notices that coming together is the resource, because the Commons offers a place for participation, collaboration, and other kinds of solidarities to emerge. The comedy of the commons enables a space of give as well as take. It imagines the wholeness that comes from the circulation of goods.

In this, the city is a Commons. It is shared, not exclusive. It is beautiful because it is complex and layered. It recognises that real people add to the city by living in it, they don't just move through it. To walk through the city is to notice a collective sense of making.



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It is not so hard to notice, especially in a pandemic, how beautiful the presence of other people makes the city. Or how eerie it is to be the only one walking around the place, how eerie it is to be dislocated from the familiarity of other people.

The bustle of the city reminds us how rewarding even the most passive collaboration can be. The city is dense with life. The city is filled with tangible and intangible resources that are meaningful to the people who inhabit it. The challenge for this initiative is how to preserve that.

“What is it like to live in a city inhabited by others (people who speak and think differently about the same streets and spaces) and whose inhabitation creates other spaces within the everyday?”

- Adapted from Alison Young.  
“Cities in the City: Street Art, Enchantment, and the Urban Commons” *Law and Literature* 26, no 2 (2014): p. 154

## GUIDING PRINCIPLES

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- 1/**  
Dismantle systems of exploitation grounded in property
- 2/**  
Foster expansive urban publics capable of rich dialogue, collaboration, and social transformation
- 3/**  
Secure a just baseline quality of life for all city inhabitants
- 4/**  
Erect new models for city governance through commons-based projects, moving away from understanding the city as a corporation
- 5/**  
Respond to climate change, forces of economic globalization, neoliberalism, and colonialism at the level of city governance
- 6/**  
Reject the co-optation of local community infrastructure and resources by economic and financial logics, including development and planning orientations toward urban space
- 7/**  
Redistribute collective resources in pursuit of anti-poverty, civic Indigenous, and community reparations-based social justice initiatives
- 8/**  
Develop legal and political mechanisms for the realization of the commons; revitalize the potential for the state to achieve democratic and egalitarian aims
- 9/**  
Deploy the Commons in support of greater access to the material and spatial resources necessary for the reproduction and expansion of community and culture within the city
- 10/**  
Embrace the potential for messiness, disruption, and discomfort in the ongoing negotiation of various commons, towards a greater sense of understanding, inclusion, and solidarity
- 11/**  
Promote place-keeping as a central social practice at the scale of the city
- 12/**  
Employ the commons as a platform as a means through which the communal use of resources becomes generative of value to the community



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### PROPERTY AND COLONIALISM

To think of the Commons is to think beyond private property relations and public regulatory control, for they are two sides of the same coin.

The colonial logic of private property excludes and regulates. Broken treaties with indigenous nations transformed Turtle Island into parcels of property. As these parcels of property became defined by colonizers, they were appropriated by the territorial understanding of the Canadian state, organized as public property, private property, and Crown land – once again, a form of property, defined by its ability to exclude other claims to sovereignty.

At the level of the city, the colonial logics of property turn private property into a space where people can enjoy personal freedoms, so long as they participate in the capitalist economy, either directly or indirectly. Public property, on the other hand, relates to intensely regulated spaces upon which dispossessed and disenfranchised people, who fundamentally rely on that space in order to keep a foothold on life, are policed and disciplined, either potentially cowed back into the labour market or marginalized from society.

The legislated city is a city where some behaviours are licenced and others are criminalized, and the permissibility of these behaviours are distributed unequally across the population according to relationships to property.

Under property relations, each form of space is highly controlled by the state and together constitute a system through which the Canadian state organizes its territory. By doing this, it excludes possibilities of individual and community life that are not conceivable according to its capitalistic logics.

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## PROPOSAL FOR THE COMMONS MASTER PLAN

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**“Because the rent was cheaper, we sought out those damp basements, and made the best of musty rehearsal rooms. We found the places that temporarily dropped out of the market. It was there we could be **free and autonomous**. ... We wanted to answer the question **“how do we want to live”** by ourselves. Do not discuss **urban development** with us. Do not show us another **community consultation** presentation and ask us to engage politely. For us, the city has always been the potential of untamed spaces, open air, uses determined by **the voices in the room**. As far as we are concerned, everything we do in this city has to do with **open spaces**, alternative ideas, **utopias**, with undermining the **logic of exploitation and location**.”**

- Adapted from Not in our name! Hamburg.  
[Jamming the gentrification machine: a manifesto.](#)

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The state's desire to regulate public space only accommodates a narrow range of personal expression and activity. In the private space, individuals and families are broken up into little isolated units, and in these spaces the freedom to actualize becomes a matter of what can be consumed. Some theorists call the grasping attitude embedded in private property by the name of 'possessive individualism': narrow, materialistic, atomized, alone, and coaxed from their isolated enclave into the marketplace by self-interest alone. It offers a limited scale of human expression for the 99%.

Those without property or material wealth are fundamentally disenfranchised; they cannot access true democracy let alone flourish.

Other communal ways of life, other individual modes of self-expression, are discouraged in the ideological relations organized under the banner of 'property', because it limits what collaboration and exchange can look like, where it can happen, and under what conditions it occurs. The neoliberal optimization of the city extends the culture-destroying logic of colonialism by removing the gathering places where collective learning, sharing, and creation are possible.

This colonial logic is what allows the Canadian state to govern both people and territory, it is what separates people from place, it is what allows people to be treated abstractly rather than as those with their own dreams about collective life.

Fortunately, this is not the way we can think of the state, governance, or the spatialization of the city.



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#### ALREADY EXISTING COMMONS

Community-building around the idea of the Commons is currently taking place across the city of Toronto. Groups like the Parkdale Community Land Trust (PSLT), the Centre for Local Research into Public Space (CLOS), TeaBase, Thorncliffe Park Women's Committee (TPWC), others make it possible to think about the community governance of space that this project imagines.

Though each might approach the concept of the commons in a different way and have prioritized certain capacities regarding their mandate and their space over others, they show how the community-based management of space opens up new potentials for what can be done in it.

#### **Parkdale Neighbourhood Land Trust (PNLT)**

The PNLT is a community-controlled non-profit organization that uses a unique model of community ownership known as a Community Land Trust (CLT) to promote long-term community benefits, affordable housing, and democratic local planning. Its action strategy is to acquire land, remove it from the real estate market and make sure it is used to meet community needs. It uses its CLT to own land on behalf of the community.

- *PNLT represents a response by the Toronto community to organize to provide for the stewardship of neighbourhood land and to protect the vitality of the local community.*

#### **The Centre for Local Research into Public Space (CLOS)**

The CLOS is a non-profit research institute, resource library and community partner. CLOS worked directly with staff at Dufferin Grove Park, Campbell Park, MacGregor Park, and Wallace Rink to run a kind of lab, an ongoing experiment in what works and what doesn't, in shaping a "community centre without walls." In the past it has collaborated in the development of food operations such as campfires, bake ovens, summer wading pool food carts, zamboni snack bar, Friday Night Supper at Dufferin Grove, Saturday Night Supper at Campbell Rink, and the Farmers' Market). With the funds generated from these programs, it has experimented with tree watering, skate lending, playground enhancement, campfires, and other infrastructure projects.

- *CLOS represents the desire for community-led development of community programs and land use by radically extending the concept of a community centre.*

#### **TeaBase**

Teabase is a community art space and community hub. It is a defiant space holder for members of Toronto's Pan-Asian diaspora and an incubator for community activism. It assumes many forms, namely a communal living room, but also a tea space, a rental space, an office, a mah-jong hall, and a garden club.

- *TeaBase represents the synthesis between art and community space, modelling the placeholding capacities of arts spaces.*

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#### Thorncliffe Park Women's Committee (TPWC)

TPWC is a culturally diverse group of women who assemble to identify the needs for the community's public spaces and adopt planning strategies accordingly. Their work around lobbying the City of Toronto to the effect of revitalizing R.V. Burgess Park has directly created a positive impact on the people of the Thorncliffe Park neighbourhood.

- *TPWC represents the deepened sense of community that the ability to access and manage a Commons makes possible. The stewardship of Thorncliffe Park displayed by the TPWC promoted the City to invest greater resources in its park space.*

"In a similar way, the Italian movement for "beni comuni" (common goods) utilizes occupation of stake public claim to abandoned and underutilized cultural (and other) structures in an effort to have those spaces either retained as, or brought back into, communal use".

- Sheila R. Foster and Christian Iaione 2016, p. 305

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## PROPOSAL FOR THE COMMONS MASTER PLAN

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#### THE INHOSPITABLE CONDITIONS OF CITIES ARE ENDEMIC TO THE CAPITALIST MODE OF PRODUCTION

Under the system of private property, the homeless and the unemployed are physically and symbolically excluded from the city.

Under the system of private property, public space is highly regulated and policed. The use and enjoyment of a space is permissible only according to certain parameters.

Under the system of private property, standard means of attending to the body, such as cooking, sleeping, bathing, defecating, and urinating, are generally unwellcome realities. As such, they are excluded from the narrow, commerce-oriented public space.

Under the system of private property, it is conceptually impossible to realize community self-determination, self-governance, and other commitments to justice for the marginalized or dispossessed. Under the system of private property, pseudopublic spaces are left to assume the functions of public spaces, such as being places to enjoy, to just be, and to gather.

Under the system of private property, nonplaces are more desirable uses of space than the messiness of actual used space. Nonplaces are open atriums, decorative lawns, and other sterile, homogeneous environments.

Under the system of private property, tenants are excluded from decisions about the upkeep, maintenance and repairs of their dwellings. They struggle to keep them free of pests, such as bedbugs, lice, mice, cockroaches, mold and rot. Relatedly, under a system of private property, through public management may be present to regulate and offer standards, it keeps an arms-length from these problems and the work of fixing them.

Under the system of private property, it becomes thinkable to privatize the municipal infrastructure that secures the baseline necessities of modern life, such as water, transit, electricity, and education.

Under the system of private property, housing is understood as a commodity, which distorts the value of housing away from its use.

Under a system of private property, the value of a city's culture is reducible to its marketability: the 6ix, the spectacle, the landscape, the experience.

Under the system of private property, public space becomes an asset through which the value of the surrounding property is assessed.

Under the system of private property, local communities remain exposed to the destabilizing and liquifying effects of neoliberal globalization.

Under the system of private property, the city is more of a corporation, or its primary resource and its product, than a community.

Therefore, the mobilization of the urban commons must contain an anti-capitalist ethos.

“People, and their connections to one another, are the most vital infrastructure of the community. Toronto may look like a skyline, but it is also more tangible, or more ephemeral than that. Toronto is the people you see every day. Toronto is the sound of so many voices. Toronto is every trace of every person as they walk through the street or navigate the roads and connect with one another.”

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## THE RIGHT TO THE CITY

The Proposal for the Commons Space is modelled around Henri Lefebvre’s much-cited idea of ‘the right to the city’. There are many ways to approach the implications of the right to the city. It calls for radically democratic authorship over the city. The universal right to the city means that everyone can claim authorship over the city, an assertion which fundamentally destabilizes the spatialization of the city that has been forced by relations of private property.

The right to the city is not just an abstract right. ‘Standing’ is meant in a dual sense, both figurative and literal. Claiming the right to the city means being in it and being able to live in it.

The right to the city is about the emplaced democratic authorship of the city.

The right to the city calls citizens to hold space for the discomforts and frictions associated with its messiness so that at other times they might be invigorated, and perhaps transformed by it. A key condition of inhabiting a city is recognizing the right to the city in others: their right to come and be, just as you are. To the city, we bring all our complexity so that we might see it in another.

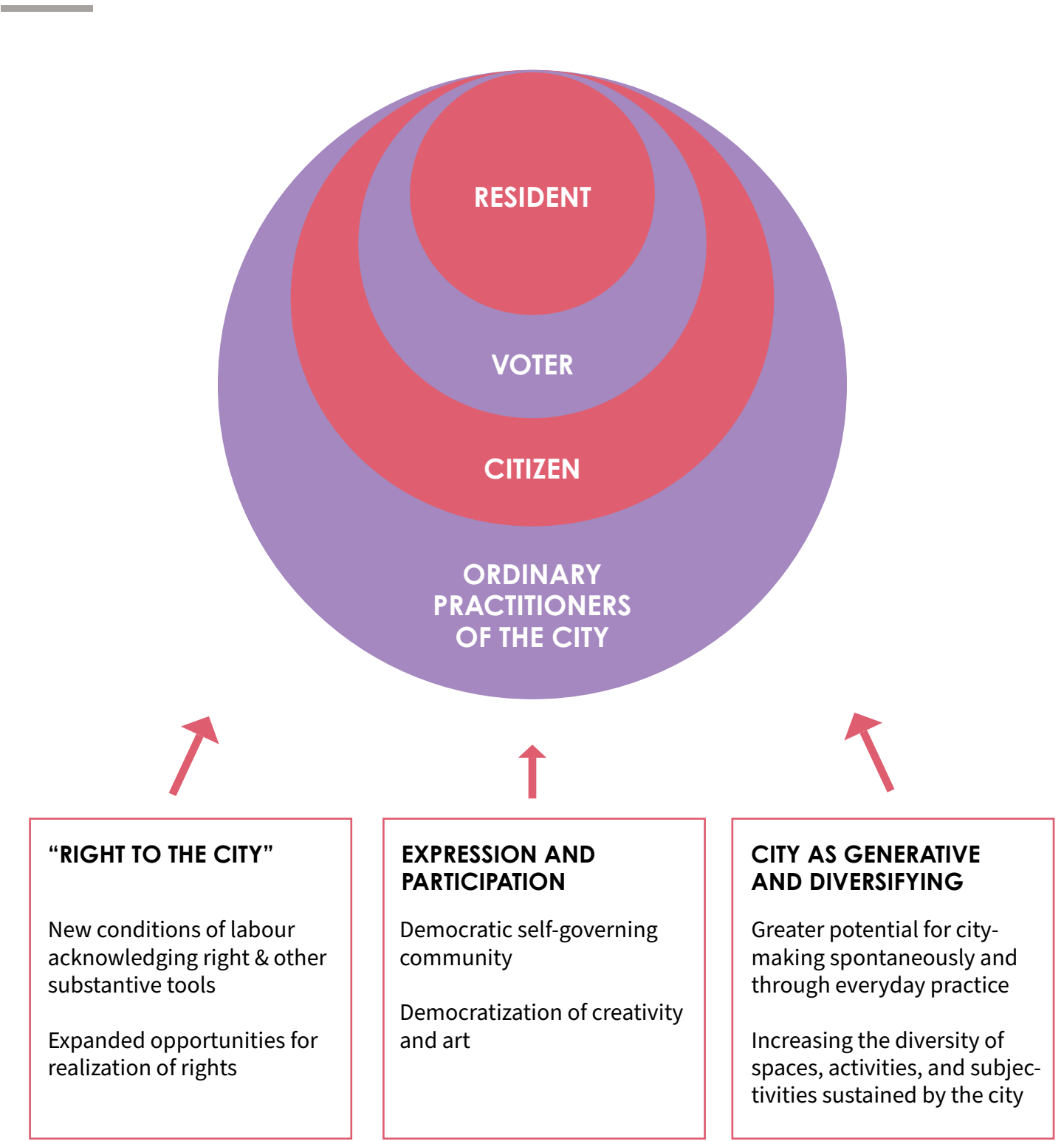
The city is not a landscape or an image or a product. The city is not a brand. The city is not a corporation, nor does it need to be governed exclusively by one. The city is not a collection of private property lots placed alongside one another like tiles with the infrastructure grout in-between. The city is not an economic resource to be optimized for financial gain.

The city is not a spectacle, but a lived-in place full of stories. It is a way of life characterized by mixture, intersection, change and creativity. The city is a total work, like an art whose medium is community. It is a place of unexpected affiliations and affinities. The spaces that a city offers for communication, imagination, and play constitute the critical spaces by which its communities can define, reproduce, and reiterate itself.

To substantiate the kind of city that the right to the city champions, a city needs to be able to support a rooted and intertwined network of communities that enable its people to feel a sense of enfranchisement. The right to the city approaches the city as a constantly shifting work in which all citizens participate, a mess of layered textures. It calls all people to use the city’s spaces and inhabit them fully.



Figure 1. The People of Increasingly Expansive Publics



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## PROPOSAL FOR THE COMMONS MASTER PLAN

### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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The right to the city makes the claim that every person is a part of the city. As it does so, it asks how cities can be constructed to sustain the life of all its people and communities and foster their well-being. The right to the city is a practical and embodied right as much as it is aspirational of democracy. Access to the collective authorship of the city means defending everyone's right to the tools to write the city, beginning with the fundamental ability to inhabit the city, day after day.

To some extent, the right to the city facilitates public participation by offering ethical reasons to embrace the contact, inclusion, mixture and the necessity of friction in urban space, to not pre-judge the mysterious and unruly entity we call the public. Like all rights, this right is only a bulwark for justice, not its realization. The right to the city helps imagine a common entitlement to city government, but it does not prescribe what that means.

The right to the city is, like every other right, a demand for recognition as an equal party. As collective holders of this right, citizens of the city engage with one another, exchange with one another, allow each other to be challenged and changed by one other. The right to the city carries dreams of social engagement, as opposed to social detachment.

The experience of difference and dynamism in the city are produced by the way a city can encourage people out into bustling social places. The right to the city does not judge who is the appropriate public and it does not look for ways to handle the people's existence fearfully or suspiciously.



# PROPOSAL FOR THE COMMONS MASTER PLAN

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



# NEOLIBERAL GOVERNANCE AND THE STATE: LOCAL, FEDERAL, GLOBAL

It is generally taken for granted that municipal governments exist in relation to Canadian federalism. This section is about how the seemingly benign relationship between municipal government and the federal structure actually supports the interests of neoliberal globalization, not to mention entrenching the colonial logics that have created the fractures between people, place, and government on Turtle Island.

This proposal seeks a decolonial framework not only in relation to symbolic restructurings of the concept of municipal governance, but also in the active dismantling of the structures of Canadian

federalism that provide for the current system, which by their nature support extractive and exploitative colonial economic logics.

In federalism, municipal governments are caught under a system where they must reproduce neo-liberal and neocolonial logics for their own economic survival. Over time, while municipalities have assumed greater responsibilities over public services, they have been prevented from accessing the financial resources necessary to maintain them due in part by parliamentary federalism.

Accordingly, City Hall has shown itself to be increasingly corporate, managerial, and removed in its relationship with the local community.

As Carlo Fanelli outlines in his book *Megacity Malaise*, what appears to be a fiscal crisis in Toronto is actually a revenue crisis rooted in the constitutional constraints placed upon municipal governments and a result of earlier neoliberal policies which have over time degraded the capacity of the city's infrastructure to deliver services to the community.



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## PROPOSAL FOR THE COMMONS MASTER PLAN

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In Toronto, the city's desire to privatize social housing and sell off assets such as its water and wastewater systems, transportation infrastructure, public transit, city buildings, facilities are a result of the city's long-term financial inability to maintain and renew existing assets, and build new ones to accommodate the service needs of a growing population. Aging infrastructure, chronic underinvestment, and staffing cuts across critical social services contribute to the impression of decay.

Manifestations of a neoliberal strategy include the erosion of

standards, attempts to privatize city services and other assets, efforts to make labour more "flexible", and tax cuts and other measures to enhance the city's global competitiveness as an appropriate candidate for investment. These games played for the global market, on behalf of Canadian government, fundamentally displaces people from cities by loosening critical welfare and labour frameworks that had enabled cities to support their communities.

In a current paradigm of forced scarcity, austerity-driven measures seem like attractive solutions to problems associated

with the city's collective assets, but this is not the only way out.

Instead of hollowing out Toronto's spaces and services to make room for the greater place of private investment and the market, the way out is to protect and deepen investment into public assets.

More radically, this proposal seeks to reimagine the state's role at the local level as steadily giving up its role as a corporate actor which pursues plans in its own economic interest and more as an enabling body which provides for the capacity of local self-determination.



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## PROPOSAL FOR THE COMMONS MASTER PLAN

### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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### A CITY FOR HOUSING

Toronto is a city experiencing both a housing boom and housing crisis.

Increasingly, the financialization of (private) housing, meaning the way capital investment exploits residential real estate as a commodity rather than a dwelling place, is contributing to the global housing crisis, and is visible in the Toronto real estate market. The value of real estate is dislocated from its function as housing, manifesting as the profound and accelerated displacement of low- and middle-income households from home ownership in

Toronto and the skyrocketing cost of rental property.

It is a failure of state governments worldwide that the realization of the right to housing has been supplanted by the parasitic interests of global capital. This distortion of housing's value by treating it as a commodity or an asset undermines the fact that housing is a basic need, because housing is a fundamental place where people live. Allowing the city to be seen as primarily an arena for economic investment in the age of global capital is to accelerate the erasure of lived-in ways of placemaking.

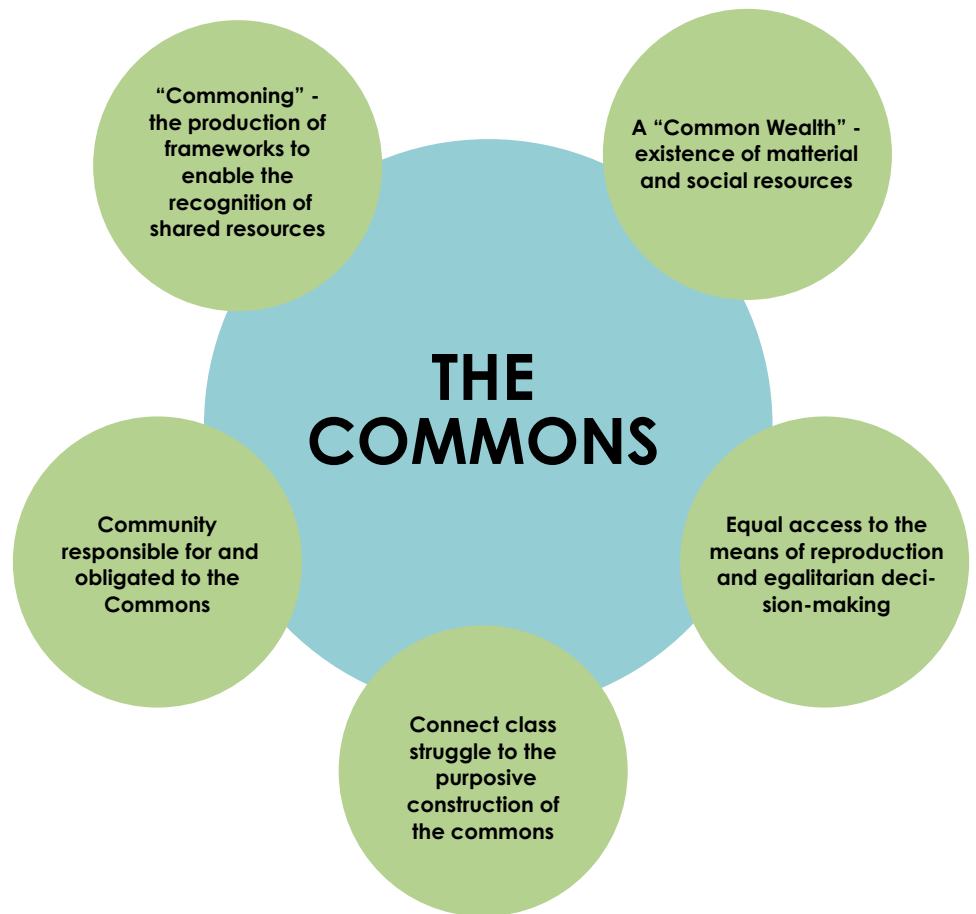
With the tools of global capital, it envisions a liquid world of commodities that sees people as merely occupants, rather than communities.

Treating housing as a commodity is at odds with habitation. It makes ghosts out of the people who would dwell inside them. The escalating cost of housing locks the poor into precarity as they struggle to afford basic shelter. Increasingly, home ownership relates to the ability to secure the asset rather than to occupy it.

**Figure 1. General Criteria for Anti-Capitalist Commons  
(Based on Federici and Caffentzis 2014)**

The financial benefits of simply holding on to a property as their value on the market continues to rise is cold comfort for those who can barely afford to live in them at all.

While speculative and abstract visions of housing are played out on larger scales through various modes of property-based speculation and development, the housing market bubble pushes the dispossessed out of the city. It imagines glassy facades, milk-white walls, hallways of infinite wallpaper, smooth roads. Every single line demarcated exactly as planned. No mixtures, no uncertainties, no people. No signs of the violent dispossession of entire neighbourhoods. In place of real people, digital renderings bring in transparent people to breeze through a necropolis of new buildings and arrested development.



"Creativity cannot be legislated or regulated into existence, nor can it be anticipated. Creativity requires an open environment, which places a high value on originality and on new ways of both looking at and doing things."

- City of Toronto. The Creative City Planning Framework. Supporting document for Agenda for Prosperity: Prospectus for a Great City. Toronto: AuthenticCity, 2008.

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## PROPOSAL FOR THE COMMONS MASTER PLAN

### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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#### CREATIVE CITY: SPACE HOLDING / PLACE KEEPING

Whatever art does, it takes up space.

In one set of conditions public art beautifies and pacifies, is pretty but complacent. This kind of art is a contribution to the city as spectacle, the kind of art favoured by city planners. It is conceived in an environment wary of risk, radiates a kind of culture that is disconnected from the lived reality of the people who live nearby. It is uncertain who this art is for. improve the aesthetic of the place for property developers and passers-by? Is it for the neighbourhood, to improve its happiness

As objectified culture, public art can literally stand in for people, and can populate a space as one form of what Henri Lefebvre called “concrete abstractions”, nothing but placeholders for real activity. Look at the public art that touches our city: silhouettes and revelers horses, canoes, roosters, forests, topography, ripples and shoals, birds, deer, fish, bells, sport, shadows and pulses. In some cases, they are benches or something else useful, but for the most part these works are for looking, but whose? What is it for art to hold space according to another set of conditions?

Art is wonderful human thing that reminds people of:

- **their voice**
- **what is possible**
- **other people, other stories**
- **ideas that might impossible to achieve**
- **collective dreams, desires, anxieties, aspirations.**

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## PROPOSAL FOR THE COMMONS MASTER PLAN

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To think of art in terms of holding space for the community is to call for a prolific, unbounded, creativity-based way of relating to art. It is not so much the product, its message, or its aesthetic qualities, but in the joy of making, witnessing, and celebrating. This is the art that shares its physical space and psychic space with the community. As a resource for the commons, the material and social practices that go into producing these objects can also be thought to take up space and hold it for the community. The same spaces, practices and communities which make art are incubators for activism, change, and aspiration.

A renaissance in the city's art spaces supports the overall project of the commons.

Already, community centres support dance, pottery, music, martial arts, visual and digital art, but they could be opened still further by being less exclusive to paid members, with access not limited by a program-based approach to accessing the space.

Allocating space for art creation is a community asset. Art spaces serve the community by “keeping the beat”.

**“The ultimate, hidden truth of the world, is that it is something that we make, and could just as easily make differently.”**

- David Graeber



## GLOSSARY: C for CITIZENSHIP, P for PRAXIS

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**Creativity:** the capacity and desire to transform the material world through imagination and play

**City:** a cultural entity; a permanent and densely settled place constituted by its own relations of government, which assumes the government of people and territory within set borders, and its extensive and layered vital systems (eg. housing, transportation, sanitation, energy, communication)

**City Hall:** a physical and ideological space of government administration, sanctified by representative democracy and Canadian federalism which must be occupied and appropriated by people who were formerly understood to be governed by it

**Civic:** relating to the rights and responsibilities associated with being included as a member of a political body; relating to a city or town, especially its administration; often relating to the curious sense of remoteness and formality with which active citizenship is treated as separate from everyday life

**Civility:** a moral-aesthetic tactic levelled against poor and working class people and POCs to deprive them of their legitimate standing as citizens and community members

**Commodity:** an economic logic which enables material products to be detached from their specific context and treated as generic, homogenous, and commensurable with one another. Eg, Corn, milk, housing, etc

**Commons:** an approach to the management of collective resources with legal and political implications; a spatialized framework build around the stewardship of various collective goods by a democratic and egalitarian community

**Commons Space:** a type of space governed by the commons; a means of realizing the nonterritorial democratization of the city according to the gradual appropriation of property by the commons

## GLOSSARY: C for CITIZENSHIP, P for PRAXIS

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**Community:** a challenging, pliable concept related to a group of people who live somehow in common with one other; a group often understood to share common characteristics, goals, values, or ownership over a common resource

**Community Land Trust:** a non-profit and democratically governed organization that owns land and puts it to use for community benefit

**Creative Class:** An invention of Richard Florida and others; a group of cosmopolitan neo-liberal subjects (“creatives”) heralded as drivers of economic development, based around the imperative: ‘be creative — or die’. Accordingly, creatives are at the whim of market demand for entertainment, creativity – for whatever entrepreneurial or productive purpose –, and cultural cache (ie. authenticity, quality, innovation, spontaneity, collaboration). These disposable minstrels around court are thought to supply it with a competitive edge

**Culture-led Regeneration:**  
That’s just gentrification

**Place-making:** the strategic act of telling a story about a place to designate it for a particular kind of use by a particular group or set of people; often an act of erasure, which can support gentrification, racism, real estate speculation, in the name of “neighborhood revitalization”

**Place-keeping:** “the active care and maintenance of a place and its social fabric by the people who live and work there. It is not just preserving buildings but keeping the cultural memories associated with a locale alive, while supporting the ability of local people to maintain their way of life as they choose” (USDAC)

**Praxis:** practice, distinguished from theory; doing, as opposed to talking about it

**Property:** the realized form of alienation; a seemingly coherent system underwritten by the idea of the State through which ownership over material objects and territory is organized

**Public:** a set of relations constituted by a centralized government and its administration related to the affairs of the people