

BATHURST MANOR

A suburban neighbourhood in transition

PL 8100
Jean-François Obregón Murillo
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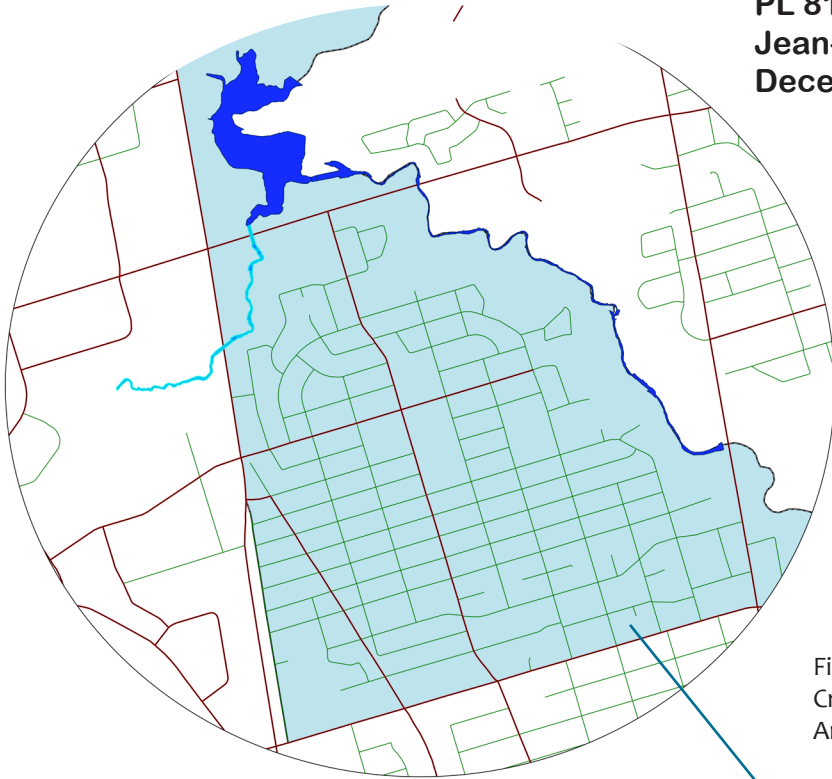
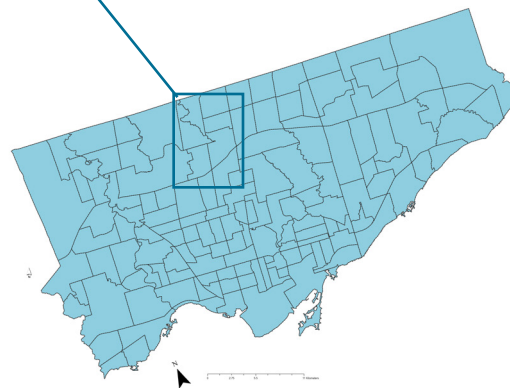


Figure 1: Key map of Bathurst Manor
Credits: Jean-François Obregón,
ArcGIS Pro, City of Toronto



Welcome to Bathurst Manor

Bathurst Manor is in North York in Toronto's northern edge. Its boundaries are Dufferin Street, which acts as a quasi-highway, fencing in G. Ross Lord Park in the northern section and the West Don River running along the northeast towards the southeast. Bike lanes were added in June 2020.

Housing was built in 1953 based on archival photography. It was farmland and forests before. Canada's first children's day camp was started here in 1956 with buildings featured in a 1965 issue of Canadian Architect. A ski hill was built in the 1950s from the Spadina Expressway's infill, but built over with homes in the 1970s.

There is a housing mix that includes detached, bungalows, duplexes, triplexes as well as rent-geared-to-income and market rent Toronto Community Housing Corporation units. A strip mall was demolished in 2016 to make way for a townhouse development.

It is a multi-ethnic neighbourhood with residents primarily of Filipino, Russian and Italian origin. There is a vibrant community centre and park, where the neighbourhood's multiculturalism is visible. The significant Jewish population is evident with the presence of synagogues and a private school. The neighbourhood's pockets of affordability offer new Canadians and longtime residents alike with a chance of upward social mobility.

Bathurst Manor: A suburb that stands out

A post-war suburb

The neighbourhood is younger than most Toronto neighbourhoods as it was farmland until the 1950s when the first residential developments broke ground. The area was known as Downsview until real estate agents gave it the aspirational Bathurst Manor name in the 1960s to sell post-war bungalows. (Figure 2) This development timeline is similar across North York. For instance, Don Mills was developed in the 1950s and 1960s.

Nature within reach

Bathurst Manor has historically been bordered by the Don River and forested areas. These edges are historic as evidenced in Figure 3's 1947 aerial photography in the Toronto Archives. The main difference in soft edges is the absence of a reservoir in what is now G. Ross Lord Park in the northern limits of Figure 4. The substantial green space makes it stand out compared to neighbourhoods in the borough of Toronto. When you are close to the river, it can feel like you are not in the city – akin to Scarborough Bluffs or Rouge Park. (Figure 3) Wildlife like brown-tailed hawks and great blue herons are present. A hawk clutching a squirrel flew by me on a visit.

Not a pedestrian paradise

With a walk score of 56, Bathurst Manor feels distant from North York Civic Centre, not to mention Toronto City Hall. With Irving W. Chapley Community Centre & Park as a starting point,

located at 215 Wilmington Avenue, a 20-minute walk takes you to two grocery stores, a bank and a pharmacy. By comparison, a five-minute bicycle ride will take you about 75% of the same destinations. While that mode is an attractive alternative, it may not be a senior's preferred choice. Neither of these scenarios will get you to Sheppard West subway station. Nevertheless, the area is well-served by the 104 Faywood bus route.



Figure 2. Advertisement for Bathurst Manor, ca. 1961
Credit: Ontario Jewish Archives, Judy Kasman Collection

Sparks of public life

Bathurst Manor residents use their front yards for socializing and productive activities. I saw several triplexes and detached homes with patio furniture and toys in their front yards. In one example, a resident seed bombed flowers around a fire hydrant. The residents' initiative indicates that they feel a sense of attachment and are comfortable to claim space for communal purposes. In the forested area along the Don River, I found a teepee. Even late at night, young people and families will walk on roads without sidewalks.



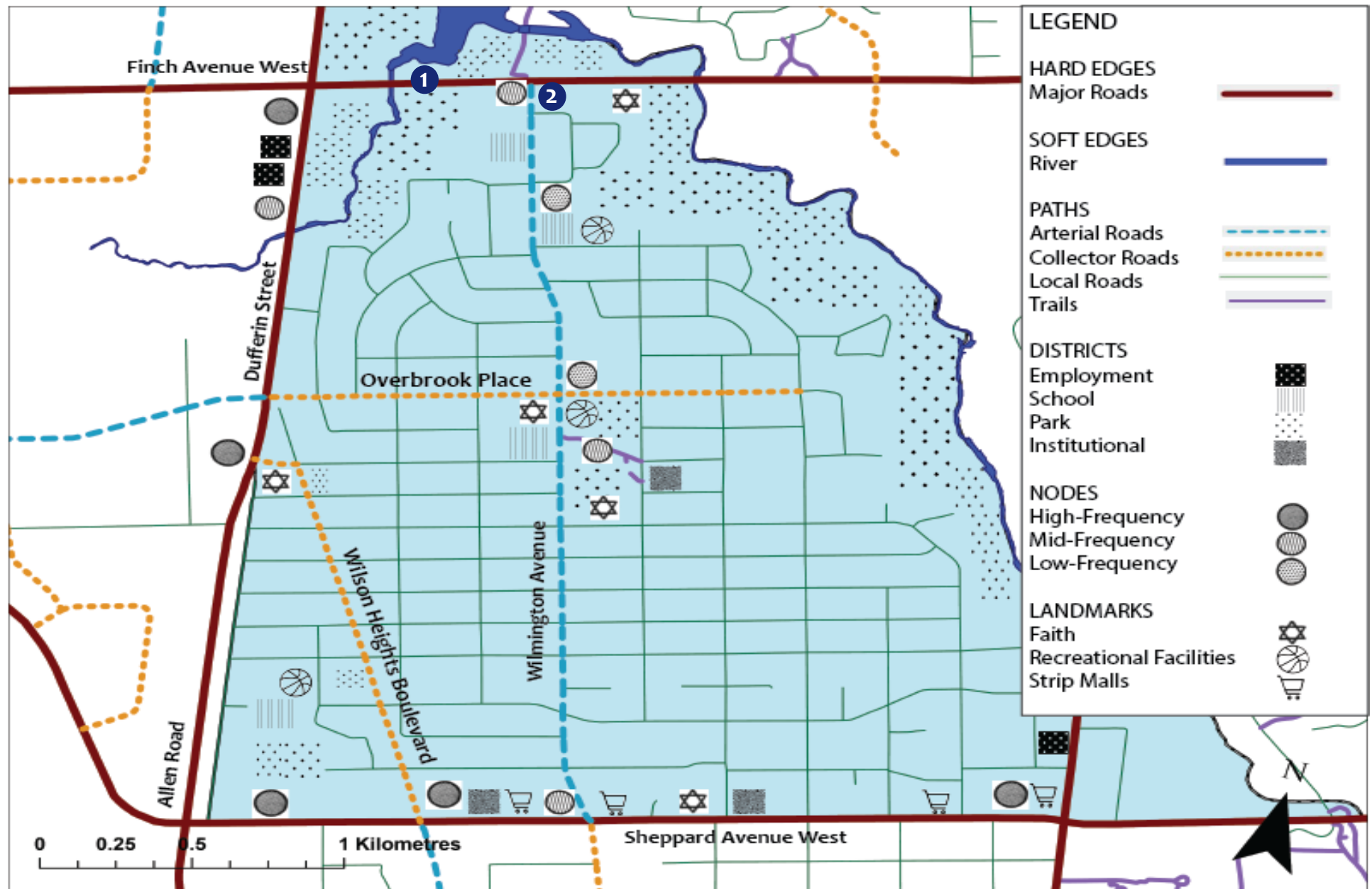
Figure 3. Teepee close to the Don River.
Credit: Jean-François Obregón



Figure 4. Aerial Photography of Bathurst Manor, 1947
Credit: City of Toronto Archives

Figure 5. Neighbourhood Map of Bathurst Manor

Credits: ArcGIS Pro, City of Toronto Open Data, Kevin Lynch, Icons Producer, Colourcreatype, Adobe Illustrator



Lynchian Elements in Context

Neighbourhood Definition

The City of Toronto lists the neighbourhood as ending at Steeles Avenue on its northern edge. I argue that the neighbourhood's hard northern edge is the G. Ross Lord Reservoir in G. Ross Lord Park as it cannot be crossed unless you swim or take a vessel. This park is heavily used by local residents. Finch Avenue is another hard northern edge due to the fast car traffic and physical barriers to prevent jaywalking. (Figure 6) Nevertheless, pedestrians find shortcuts between Finch Ave. and Wilmington Avenue. (Figure 7)

Hard Edges

The western hard edge is Allen Road, which becomes Dufferin Street, and runs north-south roadway along the middle of Figure 4. Motorists tend to drive at or above the posted 60 kilometres/hour speed limit along the road's six-lanes. This makes it hostile for cyclists or pedestrians to cross at Dufferin St. to access Yummy Market, a supermarket catering to Toronto's Soviet diaspora, which is also the biggest group by ethnic origin in Bathurst Manor. This strip mall is a mid-frequency node as shoppers by foot, car and transit were observed. The higher density from mid-rise condominium developments and presence of strip malls on Sheppard Avenue is Bathurst Manor's hard southern edge.

Toronto Community Housing

It is telling that most of the Toronto City Housing Corporation's Rent-Geared-to-Income and

Market rent units are located along or near Dufferin St. These homes feel separated from the rest of the neighbourhood. The noise pollution was significant around these units during every visit. It was a contrast to quieter sections close to the Don River.



Figure 6: Barriers to prevent jaywalking. (Photo 1 on Map) Credit: Jean-François Obregón

Soft Edges

Bathurst Manor's soft edges are the creek bordering its northwest area and the Don River running northeast to southeast on Figure 4. These rivers have forested areas that serve as destinations for fishing, birdwatching and exercise. They are also access points for the Prosserman Jewish Community Centre and Holocaust Museum on Bathurst St.

Nodes

The intersections entering the neighbourhood on Finch Ave., Dufferin St. and Sheppard Ave. are its high-frequency nodes with mostly car and bus traffic. The node at Allen Rd. and Sheppard Ave.

West is located at Sheppard West subway station. Sheppard Plaza at Sheppard Avenue and Bathurst St. is a high-frequency node for its grocery store, bank and health offices.

Mid-Frequency nodes have moderate vehicular traffic, increased pedestrian interactions and proximity to employment districts. Irving W. Chapley Community Centre & Park is considered such a node based on the significant amount of recreational activity for children, teenagers, adults and parents. I would consider it the neighbourhood's true community centre as it has two synagogues and a retirement residence in proximity. The park acts a hub of social cohesion between children and adolescents from TCHC homes, the local Community Hebrew Academy of Toronto school and those residing in the more affluent sections of Bathurst Manor. Low-Frequency nodes are the schools close to Finch Ave. and Wilmington Ave. as well as Overbrook Place and Wilmington Ave. as activity is limited to schoolchildren and parents.



Figure 7. Footpath shortcut. (Photo 2 on Map) Credit: Jean-François Obregón

Data and Everyday Life

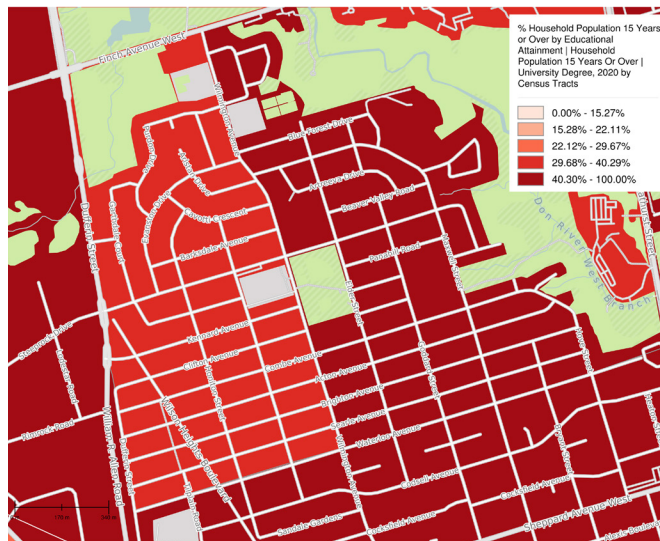


Figure 7. Percentage of household population with post-secondary education in 2020. Credit: SimplyAnalytics

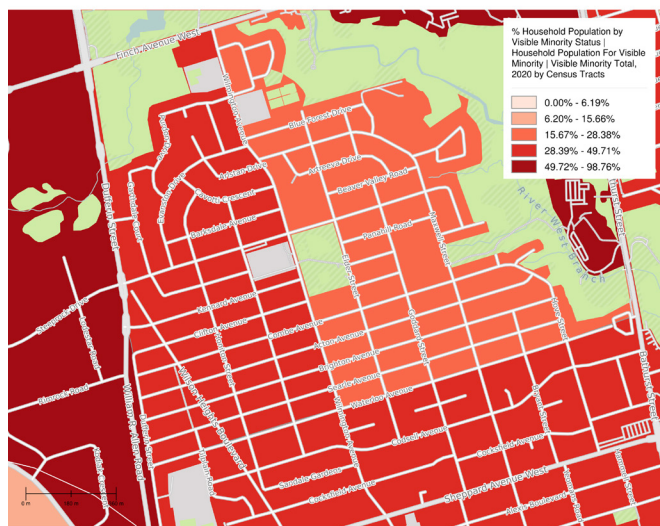


Figure 8. Percentage of household population with visible minority status in 2020. Credit: SimplyAnalytics

Bathurst Manor is split into two Statistics Canada census tracts: 0310.01 west of Wilmington Avenue and 0310.02 on the east of that street. The western census tract is lower-income, lower-educated and more ethnically diverse than the eastern one. The income number may be driven down by the number of TCHC units, which are all located in census tract 0310.01. According to Statscan data, a lower percentage of 0310.01 (west side) residents reported a non-official language as their mother tongue (39%) in 2016 than in census tract 0310.02 (50%). This indicates a level of economic mobility throughout the lifetime of individuals in the wealthier part of Bathurst Manor.

A multi-ethnic neighbourhood

Based on my observations, the neighbourhood is multi-ethnic with individuals who are primarily Filipino, Russian and other white-presenting ethnicities. This is supported by City of Toronto Neighbourhood Profiles listing the top three ethnic origins as Filipino, Russian and Italian. Figure 10 indicates the breakdown of ethnic origin according to the 2016 Census. Filipinos, Russians and Italians were respectively the biggest groups within the Eastern & Southeast Asia, Eastern Europe and Southern Europe categories in Figure 10. After English, the languages that were most spoken at home according to the 2016 Census were Russian (6.0%) and Tagalog (4.0%). (Figure 10)

There is a significant Jewish population, which is evident from the presence of three synagogues,

Jewish private schools, Jewish community centre and Holocaust Museum. In 1961, Jews reportedly accounted for 7,000 (76%) of Bathurst Manor's 9,200 residents. Steinberg's grocery store at Bathurst Street and Sheppard Avenue offered Kosher meats at the time. Today, there is a Metro in its place. Today, those of Jewish or Israeli origin account for 9.4% of residents. (Figure 9)

Bathurst Manor's western side has a higher percentage of household population by visible minority status (28.4%-49.7%) compared with 15.7% to 28.4% in the adjacent census tract based on 2020 Statscan data. (Figure 8) On my visits, I noticed workers, primarily of communities of colour, leaving for or returning from work in the late-afternoon by bus or bicycle. This may be substantiated by the fact that 32.1% of the neighbourhood had lower education in 2016, according to City of Toronto data. Figure 7 shows that the western part of Bathurst Manor had the lowest percentage of post-secondary education.

Housing Mix

There is a diverse housing mix of duplexes, triplexes and rental apartment buildings in the western part of the neighbourhood. The proximity to public schools, retail stores, and public transportation lends itself to a limited degree to Doug Saunders' concept of an "arrival city", where immigrants can settle and attain a level of social mobility based on the local infrastructure. The concept also dovetails with the neighbourhood's history as many in the Jewish community moved here in the 1960's from Forest

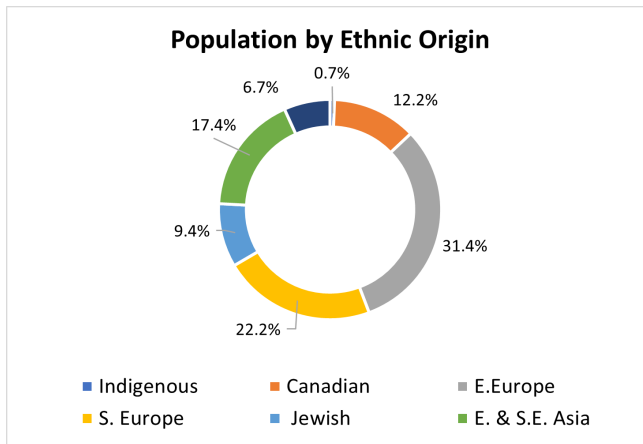


Figure 9. Source: Jean-François Obregón, Statscan

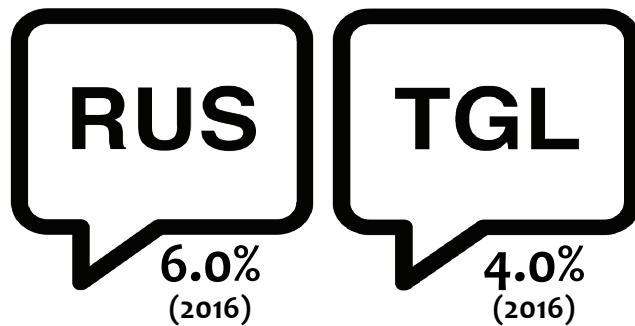


Figure 10. Languages other than English spoken in households. Source: Statscan. Credit: Jonathan Coutiño, The Noun Project

Hill and Cedarvale due to its housing affordability. Their offspring have moved up Bathurst St. again over time to Thornhill or Richmond Hill. This also explains the drop in Jewish residents since the 1960s. However, median shelter cost for renter households in 2016 was \$1,231, slightly above the city average, despite TCHC units and likely driven up by private market rentals profiting from a relatively central location. Active development

applications have not designated any affordable housing units.

Public Life

The low amount of public life in this neighbourhood can make residents, including young people, feel left behind if there is insufficient investment in recreational facilities, transit and even employment opportunities. Hence, its public realm improvements stood out to me here more than in other neighbourhoods. The bus stop in Figure 9 was an example of recognizing that riders need safe space from the road while waiting for the 104 Faywood bus. I saw commuters sitting on its steps waiting for the bus. There was a local road designated as a “Quiet Street” as part of the ActiveTO program. While these interventions show that the local government is not forgetting about Bathurst Manor, it is unclear how far this commitment goes.

Properties on the rise

Reinvestment in homes is evident wherever you walk in Bathurst Manor. I saw several homes that had been recently built after demolishing the original home on the lot. These houses contrasted with the bungalows built in the 1960s and 1970s around them. I also saw homes that were in various stages of construction; the design of some looked similar to recently rebuilt ones. A single townhome among a newly-built row on Wilmington Avenue is listed for \$1.88 million. Overall, this is evidence that property developers see potential for higher real estate values in

the area. However, it does pose a risk for the neighbourhood’s classic post-war bungalows.

What does the future look like?

Under the Official Plan, most of the neighbourhood’s land use designations would remain untouched. However, there are mixed use areas that will undergo significant change. One proposal is for a six-story building, where the beloved Bathurst Manor strip mall once stood. It was zoned as a local shopping centre under the former City of North York Zoning By-law 7625.

The development proposal in Figure 11 has 394 units in a mixed-use townhome complex. The increased density as well as people and vehicular traffic will increase Bathurst Manor’s daily activity. However, the plans for increased public amenities are only a parkette. Thus, the development may be a lost opportunity for increased social cohesion across income and ethnic divisions.



Figure 11. Development proposal close to Irving W. Chapley Park. Credit: Jean-François Obregón

Density in a Post-War Suburb

Provincial Legislation

The residential and mixed use developments that exist and are proposed along Sheppard Ave. West and Wilmington Ave. They align with the Places to Grow Act, S(1) (b) and S(6) (d) (i) addressing efficient use of infrastructure and intensification, respectively. These developments also comply with the Provincial Policy Statement, s.1.1.3, which is supportive of increased density. S.1.1.3.3 stipulates that planning authorities identify locations for transit-supportive development and prioritize intensification and redevelopment.

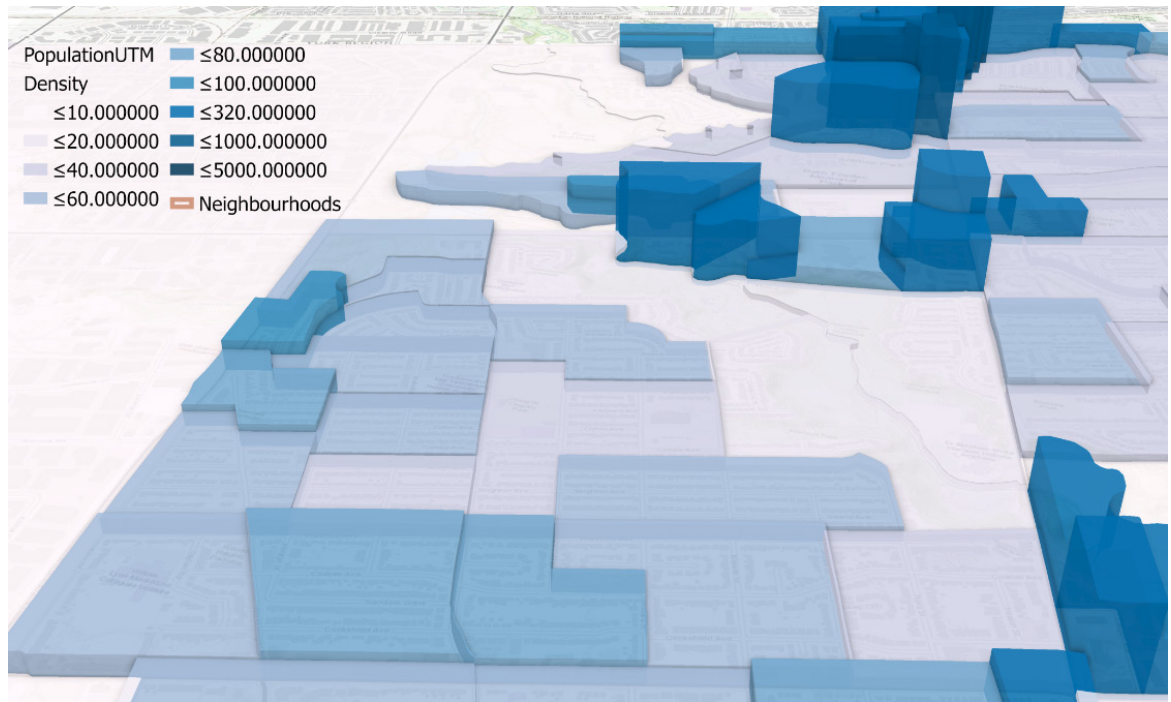
City of Toronto Official Plan

Sheppard West is considered an “Avenue” within the Official Plan, a designation that focuses on reurbanization along arterial corridors. The theme of reducing auto dependency by reurbanizing through infill housing and mixed-use development is evident in the Official Plan, particularly for post-war suburbs like the ones around Sheppard West. The apartment buildings that have been along Sheppard West over the past 15 years fulfill the

Official Plan’s Policies for Development Criteria in Mixed Use Areas 2.

Sheppard West/Dublin Secondary Plan

Bathurst Manor’s southern edge is subject to the Sheppard West/Dublin Secondary Plan whose objective is to encourage and maintain a diversity of residential, institutional, retail and commercial uses.(Photo 7)The plan directs primary commercial areas to be at intersections along Sheppard Ave.



The Secondary Plan stipulates maximum building heights and densities. Exceptions apply as 760 Sheppard Ave. West has an eight-floor apartment despite the Secondary Plan indicating a maximum of five storeys for building heights.

Mid-Rise Infill Development

There is increasingly dense development happening in Bathurst Manor. A development application for 221-245 Wilmington Ave. is on the former site of the Bathurst Manor Plaza strip mall and proposes 394 townhome units. A 9-storey development is being proposed at 702-716 Sheppard Ave. West on a greenfield site. Lots are also being bought and redeveloped into townhomes. Such is the case of 31-35 Wilmington

Figure 12: 3D Massing of Bathurst Manor Density. Sources: City of Toronto, ArcGIS Pro.

Ave., where homes were demolished to make way for townhouses. (Photo 2)

These developments will increase demand for roads, parks, schools and recreational facilities. There are investments being made to support future density. For instance, basement flooding protection, water-main and sewer replacement projects have been ongoing on every visit since September. According to notes from a June 2020 public meeting with Councillor James Pasternak, a “state of the art” new library will replace the existing one. However, other improvements are minor, e.g. creating a new seating area at Irving W. Chapley Park.

Figure 13: Housing Archetypes



Detached housing development

It is common to see large 2-3 storey homes that were recently built next to post-war bungalows in Bathurst Manor. (Photos 1 and 9) There are several lots with this type of construction. This is supported by the numerous active Community Planning and Committee of Adjustment applications, according to the City of Toronto Application Information Centre. Hence, larger fire hydrants are currently being installed may anticipate larger homes being built.

Institutional Uses

There is a retirement facility at 147 Elder Street among bungalows and duplexes. (see Photo 3) It indicates that redevelopments are serving a whole spectrum of age groups. Its placement stood out to me as I have observed retirement residences often being on arterial roads.

A turning point

Bathurst Manor offers lessons for outer-ring suburbs on increasing density in a gentle fashion and spreading it out across a neighbourhood. Social housing (Photo 8) and rental apartments (Photo 6) offer recent immigrants an opportunity for upward social mobility. Maintaining such an affordability does not appear to be a priority for the local councillor or in the development proposals. Thus, the neighbourhood risks gentrifying as new residents move in.

Credit: Jean-François Obregón

Car Culture Is Still Strong

A mix of modes

Notes from a June 2020 public meeting with Councillor James Pasternak detail concerns about loud, fast cars on Dufferin St. and requests for speed bumps on Overbrook Pl. There is investment in cycling infrastructure and public transit service. Its land use patterns are aligned with S.1.1.3.2 of the PPS favouring efficient development, active transportation and transit. The neighbourhood's recent cycling infrastructure investments are aligned with the PPS, S.1.8.1 b) promoting the use of active transportation and transit.

A bumpy road towards Complete Streets

Toronto's Official Plan stipulates that a Complete Streets approach will be incorporated into new and existing streets. This is evident in Bathurst Manor with the recent installation of cycling lanes. The OP also prioritizes designing sidewalks that are "safe, attractive, interesting and comfortable" for pedestrians. Currently, this is not the case in the neighbourhood. The figure ground in Figure 15 illustrates the dominance of cars as it is common to see bungalow driveways with 2-3 vehicles.

The future of transit

The TTC's 5 Year Service Plan & 10 Year Outlook highlights Bathurst Manor as an area of anticipated employment growth. It plans to increase bus service as developments like 221-245 Wilmington Avenue near completion. I rode the 104 Faywood route several times mainly with school students, youth and women who were



Figure 14: Cross-section at Wilmington Ave.
Credit: Jean-François Obregón

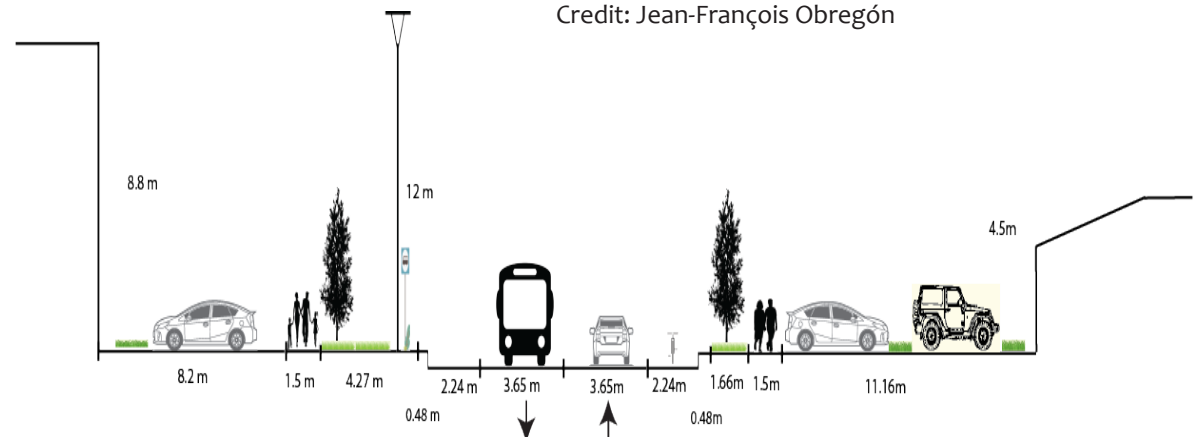


Figure 15: Cross-section at Wilmington Ave. Credits: Jean-François Obregón, Adobe Illustrator, chen king, Miguel Angel, Jacqueline Fernandes, nightwolfdezines.

often from communities of colour. It was never crowded. Overall, there is evidence of the TTC making transit stops as comfortable and safe as possible for Bathurst Manor. (Figure 16)

Room for cyclists

COVID-19 and Toronto's ActiveTO catalyzed cycling infrastructure investments in Bathurst Manor. Bike lanes were painted on Wilmington Avenue between Sheppard Avenue and Finch Avenue in June 2020. They were utilized by commuter and recreational cyclists during my visits. As well, a Public Bike Share Toronto station was installed at G. Ross Lord Park near the neighbourhood's northern edge. I never saw one in Bathurst Manor in any of my visits as these bikes are meant for recreational usage along the east-west corridor north of the neighbourhood. Blue Forest Drive was designated a "Quiet Street" as part of ActiveTO in June 2020 until October 2020. It is a quiet residential street with bungalows and had no sidewalks. (Figure 17)

The state of sidewalks or lack thereof

Distances to destinations like local shops or bus stops feel significant when walking given its low-density. A 15-minute walk from Irving W. Chapley Community Centre will not take you to a grocery store with fresh produce. The entrance to Sheppard Plaza strip mall is not pedestrian-friendly, which can make walking for groceries a hostile experience. (Figure 18)

This issue is of concern to me because most of the

pedestrians observed were women, people of colour, seniors, or intersections of these groups. However, sidewalks do not exist on several local roads, which may make seniors and young parents feel unsafe when walking. I understood this firsthand when walking with my mother on a visit and seeing her reluctance at taking streets without sidewalks. On visits alone, motorists sometimes passed by me at higher speeds on these streets. Of the 12 local roads bisecting Wilmington Avenue, only 3 have them have sidewalks. Therefore, the poor pedestrian infrastructure disproportionately affects members of the most vulnerable segments of the population.

Furthermore, the neighbourhood does not lend itself to a variety of uses across age groups. Children are prevented from drawing or playing on sidewalks. Nor is it favourable for Personal Support Workers who take transit and walk to see clients, who are ageing in place in their homes.

The situation is reminiscent of the experiences detailed by black and racialized women in *Race and Spatial Imaginary* and *A Patterned Justice*. Interviewees detail the personal impacts of disinvestment in their neighbourhood. The lack of sidewalks may be isolating individuals who do not drive or make them feel disempowered to leave for walks. The fact that no pedestrian issues were raised at Councillor Pasternak's June 2020 public meeting suggests that the attendees did not prioritize this issue or that pedestrians were not in the room. More experiments like the ActiveTO "Quiet Street" may be beneficial for getting more people walking and claiming street space.



Figure 16: TTC Stop. Credit: Jean-François Obregón



Figure 17: ActiveTO Quiet Street on Blue Forest Drive. Credit: Jean-François Obregón



Figure 18: Sheppard Plaza entrance. Credit: Jean-François Obregón

The Public Realm in Bathurst Manor

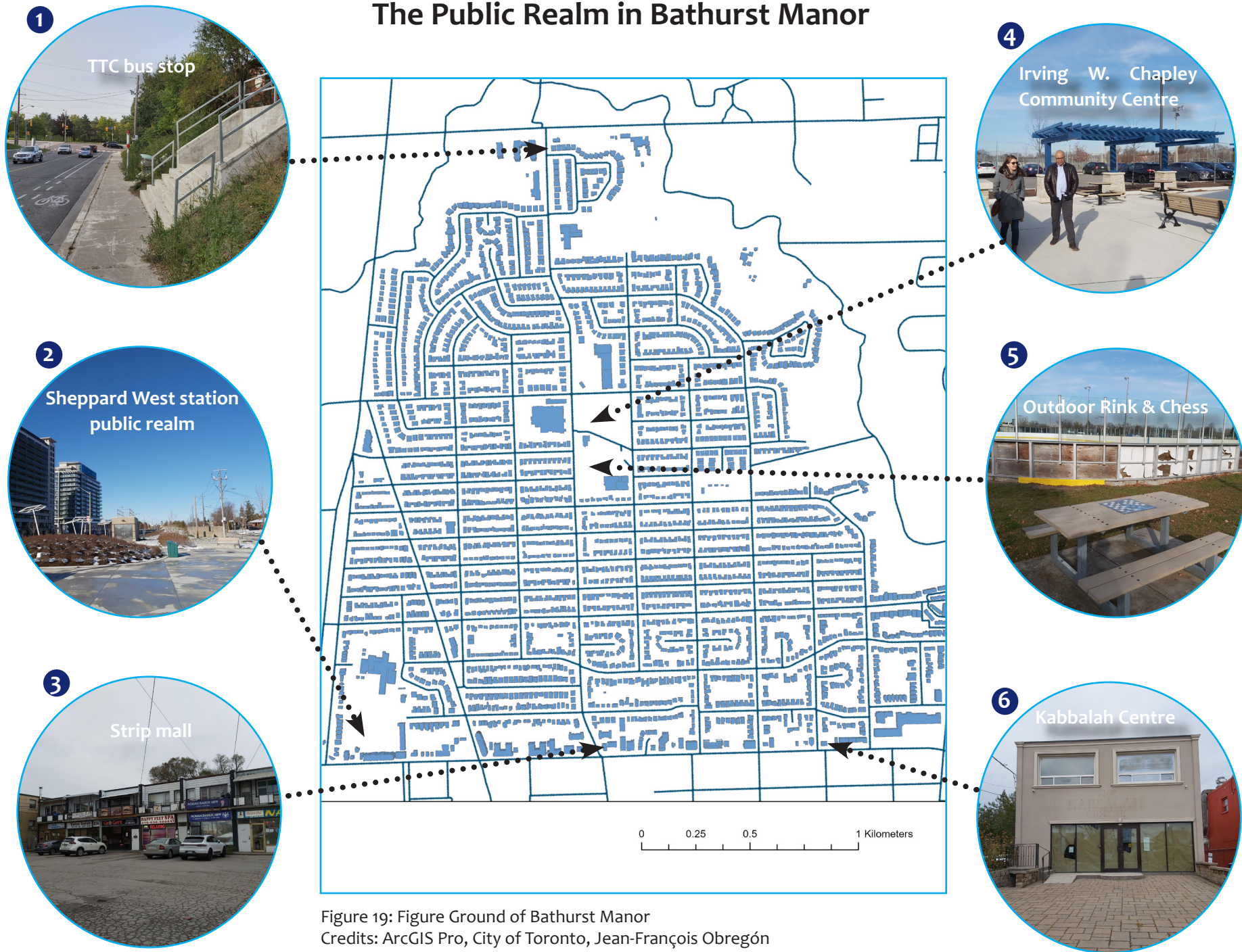


Figure 19: Figure Ground of Bathurst Manor
Credits: ArcGIS Pro, City of Toronto, Jean-François Obregón

Public Realm Improvements

Attempts to improve the public realm have had mixed results. Art installations and benches, at the corner of Allen Rd. and Sheppard Ave. West were officially opened in October 2020. (Photo 2) I have seen it function as a passenger pick-up and drop-off area for Sheppard West station, but have not yet seen any use of it as a public space. Councillor James Pasternak has indicated that there will be similar projects west of Bathurst Manor, but none planned for the neighbourhood.

The Policy Hierarchy

The public realm improvements are aligned with the Places to Grow Act, S. 1 (b) promoting an approach to land use that makes “efficient use of infrastructure.” These efforts are in accordance with the Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe, S.4.e) supporting complete communities development by providing a “vibrant public realm.” The improvements also align with Toronto’s Official Plan that promote safe and comfortable use of streets, pedestrian amenities, tree plantings and public art.

Public Realm Observations

The raised seating by the TTC stop in Photo 1 reflected safety and empathy for the user experience. The picnic tables and benches at Irving W. Chapley Community Centre and Park were built in the last two years but, have been empty during most of my visits. (Photo 4) The location next to a parking lot is also awkward as motorists are going for the sports facilities. The circulation through the park does not have

sufficient diversity to encourage lingering at these benches. Unfortunately, I never saw the chess boards bolted to these tables being used. (Photo 5)

The Cultural Heritage of Strip Malls

Small shops will exist according to conceptual drawings at 221-245 Wilmington Ave.’s townhouse development. However, it will likely be a strong contrast to the cultural significant that that previous Bathurst Manor Plaza strip mall had, particularly for the Jewish community with the presence of a bagel shop and kosher pizzeria. The site is across the street from a Community Hebrew Academy of Toronto school location and two synagogues. Irving W. Chapley Park is named after a late Jewish North York and Metropolitan Toronto councillor. The vibrancy that this intersection must have once had for the Jewish is hard to imagine today. It is too soon to know if the new shops will serve the area’s Jewish residents. The 221-245 Wilmington Ave. townhouse development will also have a private parkette. The presence of a privately-owned public space will stand out with the proximity of publicly-available recreational facilities.

The strength of the Jewish community remains evident in the local businesses and institutions. Regina’s Kitchen is a deli serving kosher meals on Sheppard Ave. The Prosserman Jewish Community Centre and the Holocaust Museum are located on Bathurst St. However, the changing demographics are evident with the closure of the Kabbalah Centre (Photo XX), where I attended a Bar Mitzvah ceremony in 2004. As many Jews have moved north on Bathurst St. in recent years, the neighbourhood no longer has the vibrancy it



Figure 20: Bathurst Manor Plaza in 2016.
Credit: Sean Marshall

once had. Unfortunately, it is hard to know the rich Jewish history of the neighbourhood from walking around as there are no plaques about it.

Bathurst Manor Plaza’s significance resonated with the entire neighbourhood, which is evident in digital archives. When it opened in the 1960s, it had a Dominion. It had a CIBC, Shoppers Drug Mart and an LCBO until 2004 when these anchor tenants moved to a big box plaza on Dufferin St. The plaza had a bakery, china shop, cigar store and dental and doctor offices. The plaza’s closure turned this neighbourhood into a food desert.

Bathurst Manor’s strip malls are emblematic of the rich blend of local shops that urbanists like Shawn Micallef have written about. They also at risk of the triple threats from rising rents, online shopping and residential development. Bathurst Manor Plaza was a microcosm of what the memories and history that is lost once these strip malls come down. Given the low traffic at a strip mall that I visited (Photo 3), this fate might be met by others, too.

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