

Special Issue | 2026

# Catch da Flava

REGENT PARK MAGAZINE

## GROWING REGENT PARK ISSUE



This special edition of Catch da Flava was produced in collaboration with  
The University of Toronto Urban Studies Program and the Focus Media Arts Centre

# Editorial

It is our pleasure to introduce you to a special **Growing Regent Park issue** of **Catch da Flava**. Catch da Flava is a monthly journalistic e-newsletter and special edition print magazine serving the Regent Park Community. The newsletter and magazine is produced by FOCUS Media Arts Centre (FOCUS), a not-for-profit organization that was established to counter negative stereotypes about the Regent Park community and provide media literacy and production programming for residents living in the area.

This special Growing Regent Park issue of Catch da Flava was produced in partnership with students and residents involved in the 2025 University of Toronto Urban Studies course called The Changing Cultures of Regent Park. This course was a 13-week collaboration between University of Toronto and the FOCUS.

The course took place at the FOCUS Media Arts Centre located in the Daniel's Spectrum Arts Centre. Together, University of Toronto students and residents of Regent Park learned about the multi-dimensional history of Regent Park focusing on topics such as immigration and racial formation, urban renewal, housing redevelopment, public health, and community organizing. Next, U of T students, residents and FOCUS journalists worked in teams to envision, research, and produce their own media project about Regent Park. In designing their projects, groups were encouraged to connect their research to contemporary dynamics in the neighborhood and mobilized their projects on various media platforms.

We are celebrating 5 years of the U of T Urban Studies Program and FOCUS partnership by publishing three special issue magazines focused on **Arts**, **Community Gardens** and **Economic Development**, featuring collaborative research conducted by students and residents.

Our collaboration aims to broaden who tells the stories of Regent Park and produce accessible participatory research to keep the community informed and engaged.



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**TORONTO**

**We hope you enjoy the magazine! - Adonis Huggins and Aditi Mehta**



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Changing Cultures of Regent Park Course**



# Catch da Flava

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## Participant Reflection

By Zahra Oman

*"This course brought me happiness I didn't expect to find in school. For the first time in my academic journey, I could fully intertwine my lived experiences in Regent Park with my academics and share them in a way that felt authentic and deeply meaningful. It wasn't just about doing research or producing media; it was about telling a story that's mine and my community's in a space where people were ready to learn. It was a space where my voice and knowledge felt valued. Before this class, I often thought I didn't belong at U of T. I used to rush home after lectures and back to my community, where I felt most like myself. But this course changed that. For the first time, I wanted to stay. I looked forward to each class because it felt like a place where I was seen and my experiences mattered. It reminded me that what I've lived through has value in that it can shape learning, planning, and how we talk about cities. I met people who genuinely cared and were open to learning about Regent Park without judgment, and that made the classroom feel safe. This course didn't feel like work. It felt like a passion project, allowing me to give back to my community while educating others. Out of all the courses I've taken, this one stands out as my favorite. Not because it was easy, but because it was honest. It reminded me that school doesn't have to be separate from the world I live in. In fact, when those two things come together, something really powerful can happen."*

# Community Gardens and Food Security in Toronto's 'Growing' Regent Park

By: Zhiyi Xu, Saima Islam, Nicholas Christou, Luka Brull, and Zahra Omar.

In Toronto's Regent Park, residents like Sayed Laskar worry about their local gardens as the area undergoes redevelopment. With residents being relocated and the neighbourhood changing, the fate of these small, personal plots of land where families have nurtured flowers and vegetables for decades remains unclear. The case of community gardening in Regent Park brings to light more significant issues of urban agriculture in the city and the barriers both gardeners and gardening organizations face in terms of accessing green space in Toronto. A neighbourhood that was once marketed as what would be an urban agricultural hub with a rich gardening history now faces numerous challenges amidst the revitalization.

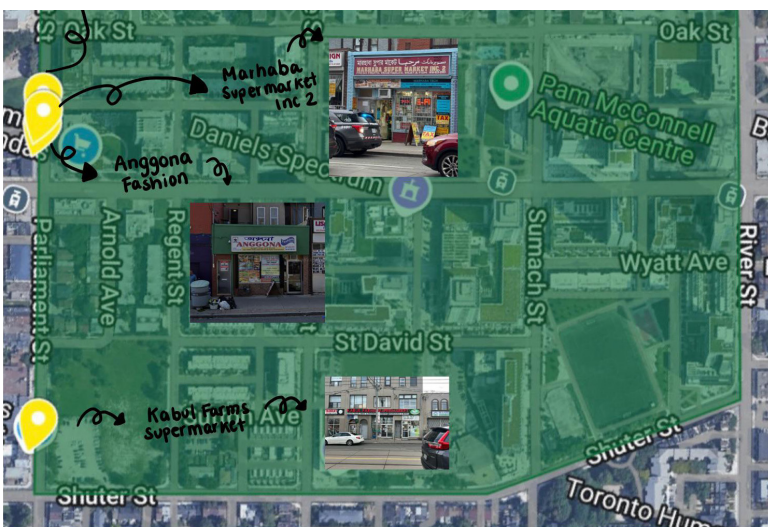
This brings us to a critical question: How can community gardens in Regent Park contribute to food security and economic justice for its residents? What challenges do they face in accessing these green spaces? In the coming years, the answers to these questions will not only shape the future of Regent Park's green spaces but also determine how the community can maintain its hard-earned traditions of urban agriculture in the face of gentrification and change.

## Food (In)Security in Regent Park

The loss of accessible gardening space in Regent Park is doing more than changing the

landscape—it's quietly driving up the cost of living. As fewer residents can grow their food, the reliance on grocery stores has increased, making everyday necessities like fresh vegetables more expensive and harder to access. Food security has always been an issue in Regent Park since it has historically been zoned for primarily residential uses. Residents were always required to travel outside of the neighbourhood to a grocery store or local store, which was not always accessible to residents.

In addition to forming community bonds and connections to the neighbourhood, gardening and growing food was a way that residents could reduce their need to venture to stores to buy fresh vegetables. This was crucial because urban agriculture is an effective way to increase food security, especially in large global cities like Toronto. As such, food security is directly linked to financial security. People may continue to experience food security issues given how difficult it is to access gardening spaces in the revitalized buildings. In that case, they will undoubtedly find themselves experiencing some level of financial insecurity. This is especially pressing nowadays as the prices of groceries continue to rise. Small ethnic grocery stores can provide products and services that large corporate grocery stores fail to offer, especially to immigrant communities. Due to the revitalization, alongside these backyard community gardens, these ethnic stores are slowly disappearing too.



Map of Small Ethnic Stores (left) and Current Garden space available (right) in Regent Park

In Regent Park, the absence of community gardens is a noticeable issue. The city continuously changes the opportunities to address food insecurity and overall well-being. Community gardens play a significant role in urban areas, especially in areas where many low-income residents struggle to access affordable and nutritious food options. These green spaces have the potential to not only improve access to healthier food but also to help build community resilience and social connections, a need that is especially critical given the tendency for revitalizations to leave people feeling displaced and isolated.

For families like Nadia's, community gardens were never an option; they were essential. We have had the chance to interview Nadia, a 21-year-old Bangladeshi resident whose family currently uses a garden space in Regent Park and, more recently, in Scarborough as well. Nadia recalls her family renting a space behind her old building, 260 Sumach St, for about \$10 a month, provided by Toronto Community Housing (TCHC). There, they planted culturally

significant vegetables like squash, bitter melon, eggplants, and chilies and used them to cook various dishes like eggplant bortha, kerela bhaji, and curries. These ingredients are essential to Nadia's Bangladeshi identity, but accessing them can be expensive, and sometimes, they are sold out even at the Bengali grocery stores that exist in the neighbourhood. These stores operate on their own shipment schedule, and can also be out of stock due to the high demand for these items from the significant immigrant populations in the neighbourhood. Community gardens provide more than just food; they preserve significance from Bangladesh to Regent Park, creating a sense of belonging, which is central to forming a community. Having access to a garden gave families like Nadia's the option to both buy or grow groceries when needed. Sometimes, even if culturally significant groceries are available, they are more expensive than just growing them at home, as said by Nadia:

*"Whenever my parents needed some type of vegetable, such as, let's say, cilantro, they were*

*able to go to the garden in Regent Park and grab it, instead of going to the store and having to buy it.”*

## Loss of Gardens

These garden plots are located along the perimeters of old Regent Park buildings. They are spacious and large, allowing numerous families that reside in each building to contribute and have plots for themselves to grow their own food. Additionally, the loss of community gardens does not just hurt food security, it also weakens social and cultural connections within the neighbourhood.

Nadia’s story reflects this situation. As her family knew their gardening plot in Regent Park would soon be demolished, they had no choice but to find another spot further east in Scarborough, where the City of Toronto offers paid garden spaces.

*“My parents actually also garden in the Scarborough area, and they got this plot through the City of Toronto. So, the City of Toronto offers various garden allotments throughout the city, and you just have to register online. And this one cost[s] about \$112 with tax.”*

The travel time from Regent Park to Nadia’s garden plot is around 25-30 minutes, a stark contrast to what she was used to, a simple flight of stairs in her old building to the backyard garden. Her parents, who once gardened and were able to do so very quickly, now must plan their trips out ahead of time to the long distance and added expenses like gas and car maintenance. What was once a spontaneous and significant part of their life is now an expensive logistical effort. Nadia explains:

*“I would definitely say the biggest challenge would be cost and time as well, because since it’s so far, you have to set aside a lot of time to travel over there to do the gardening, like maintaining and, you know, watering and feeding the soil, etc. So definitely, time and costs are the biggest challenges.”*

This change affects not only their family’s access to food but also their physical and social routines. Just a few blocks down the street, Sayed Laskar is another long-term resident of Regent Park who shared a story of love and loss of gardening. For over two decades, Sayed has lived at 259 Sumach Street and has transformed the modest front of his building into a more vibrant space with his flower gardens when the weather gets warm. The residents of 259 Sumach are no strangers to tulips, daffodils and various roses when spring arrives. Sayed’s garden is a common subject in people’s photos, and he regularly receives compliments on his efforts as well. Neighbours even collect these flowers to take to weddings or funerals, as Sayed recalls:

*“A lot of people pick flowers from my garden. One day, a lady was picking my flowers, and I asked, ‘Why are you picking flowers?’ She said I’m going to a funeral. I felt proud.”*

Flowers are not the only thing Sayed grows; he and 15 other tenants maintain a 40x40-foot community vegetable garden supported by Fred Victor. It is a social service charitable organization that works with low-income people living across Toronto and does a lot of work with Regent Park residents with edible food gardens. His plot, which was 10x10 feet, contained spinach, green chili, squash, tomatoes and at one point, two pumpkins that weighed over 16 pounds each. As redevelopment moves into

Phase 4, Sayed's building is scheduled for demolition, putting his garden at risk. He tried requesting gardening space in his future building at 175 Oak Street, but he received no response from Toronto Community Housing.

*"I sent the email...requesting for a spot...It was more than a month ago... I didn't get any response" he said.*

Sayed's concerns reflect many residents' experiences with obtaining a new garden spot amidst the redevelopment. It became more competitive as they chose who obtained the more limited new garden plots through a lottery system. Additionally, these spaces are smaller than those of pre-redevelopment as now they can only hold space for a couple of herbs or tomatoes to grow. In certain buildings, there are around 12 garden beds available for over 200 households.

Despite this, the need and desire to garden has not disappeared, as Nadia noted how many residents now resort to planting on their balconies or in front of their townhouse units. According to Nadia, this is not allowed, but residents fought for this to stay. Nadia explains:

*"The people who live there, I've seen that they kind of take it upon themselves to create their*



Photos of various community gardens outside old Regent Park buildings. Photo Credits: Sunday Harrison, Executive Director of Green Thumbs

*own garden, out of their front porch or front lawn. And I know, I believe, for my building, at first, it wasn't allowed, but the tenants were very strong about it, and eventually, it was allowed. So if you walk around my building, you'll see people growing tomatoes, chilies, squash, long beans, etc."*

Both Sayed and Nadia shared how gardening runs in their families, particularly in Bangladesh. It was an essential part of their daily survival and identity; therefore, recreating it in Toronto was especially crucial for elders who may not participate in other types of recreation or public life. Nadia noted that:

*"My parents, they don't really partake in any like physical activities or sports, so when it's summertime, gardening is kind of their main form of physical activity, and it just keeps them healthy and like strong."*

Studies have shown that community gardening provides people with physical and mental health benefits, which include reducing cholesterol levels and blood pressure, as well as reducing the risk of chronic illnesses that are common in older adults.<sup>1</sup> However, as Regent Park continues to change, the community gardens that once helped so many families are disappearing. What used to be easy, affordable, and a part of everyday life for many residents is now more challenging to reach, more expensive and limited to fewer people in the neighbourhood. Now, the question is no longer whether people want to garden but whether the city or TCHC will give them the space to keep doing it.

While the newly constructed buildings and spaces resulting from the redevelopment have been praised for "revitalizing" the neighbourhood,

it has come at the cost of essential gardening spaces. Before the revitalization, it was very common for residents to grow assorted vegetables, fruits, and spices in gardens that were easily accessible to their residences. This was seen all over the neighbourhood, not just in the iconic (or perhaps notorious, depending on who you ask) original brick apartment buildings from the 1940s. In the detached homes, the townhouses, and other areas, residents grew their food wherever possible.

Even though the older buildings were criticized for having poorly designed public and communal spaces, residents made the best of their situation and found that the old buildings made for great urban agriculture. For the time being, you can still see many of these gardens lining the walls of the old buildings along Oak Street in the northern part of the neighbourhood that has yet to be knocked down for redevelopment. For example, 295 Sackville Street's east-facing side is lined with a garden that receives care and attention from residents. Being along the building's exterior walls and right by the main entrance means that residents can not only easily access this garden but feel connected to it as they see their hard work and passion every time they enter and exit their homes.

## Barriers to Accessibility

Easy access to the gardens is something that has been lost with the new developments. While it is great that the revitalized buildings provide new amenities and services for residents to use, easy access to the gardens has been made difficult at best and impossible at worst. There are few options for residents now who wish to garden, and despite having a greenhouse which would allow for year-long growth and gardening, the Regent Park Community Garden on Sackville Street is only accessible during the summer.

One of the primary issues was the limited functionality and accessibility of the only greenhouse in Regent Park. Although greenhouses are typically used to create controlled environments that extend the growing season, this particular structure is seasonal. It lacks heating and does not fully serve its intended purpose. In the winter, the pipes freeze, leaving it cold and barren. Since it was built over a decade ago, it has remained a passive space rather than an active resource for year-round urban agriculture. Additionally, access is restricted, as it is occasionally used by members of Green Thumbs, a non-profit that teaches kids how to grow their own food, leaving many residents without the opportunity to utilize it.

Residents in the new developments can only access gardens on the rooftops of the new condos, and that is only if their building has a rooftop garden space to begin with, which many lack. The choice and ability to garden is now left up to chance. Even if a resident is lucky enough to live in a building that has garden space, this does not mean that it is readily accessible to them. Now that public garden spaces are managed by larger organizations, such as Green Thumbs or Fred Victor, this has added multiple



layers of complexity and barriers to accessing garden spaces. Instead of a resident being able to hop out of their building and garden to their heart's content, permission must be granted to access garden space. Once permission is given, you need someone to grant you access through what could be one of many locked doors. One of these gardens is on the roof of Daniels Spectrum, located at 585 Dundas Street East, and it is currently completely inaccessible to everybody because there are no railings on the rooftop area. As a result, no one has been able to garden or use the space for anything. This is a critically unfortunate change since gardening is such a valuable practice to many residents in Regent Park. Sunday Harrison, the founder and executive director of Green Thumbs, spoke about how restricting these inadequacies are and why it's important to maintain access to gardening spaces:

*"I know from talking to people how important the gardens were and are to food security because of the high cost of good quality food. People want, not just, you know, bologna sandwiches. They know that nutritious food comes from the soil, and they know that taking care of the soil is our human responsibility. It's part of who we are, even if we live in the city, taking care of the soil that feeds us is part of our cultures around the world."*

While the new buildings are in the pre-construction phases, many massive empty lots are present throughout the neighbourhood, yet see no use from the community. Even though all spaces in the neighbourhood are scheduled and planned to be revitalized, until shovels hit the ground and before buildings are built, lots can remain empty for years. It would be fantastic if residents could use the spaces temporarily for 5-10 years before anything is done to the

empty lots, to garden and produce food for the neighbourhood. In fact, Sunday discussed a proposal to do just that:

*"The Bowery project would bring in these milk crate gardens and grow food in the meantime before the building goes up. So they had a proposal for a garden area in the middle of phases four and five, like the same idea, like in that open area between [when a building lot is empty and when it is completed]."*

Using the land more productively during periods of transition and disuse would make the construction and all the changes to the neighbourhood a little more bearable as well. Even though it would not be a permanent fixture of the neighbourhood, it would at least allow residents to keep growing their own food. In addition to yielding food, using empty lots would keep residents active in gardening and provide the neighbourhood with more passion and interest in gardening for years. After years of gardening in spaces of transition, it would be easier to encourage new and bigger gardening spaces in future redevelopments.

Even though the population of Regent Park is diverse, with many immigrants coming from all over the world, many are united and find common ground with gardening. Isaac Mendita, a former Regent Park resident and former student of *The Changing Cultures of Regent Park* course<sup>2</sup>, has observed, researched, and written about how gardening connects people in the neighbourhood in his project, *The Green Atlas*:

*"Even though there's a lot of these narratives that were created of Regent Park being a terrible place because of crime, violence, this and that, but never really, you know, showed the truth*

*behind how connections were made through green spaces and how people became much more of a tighter community through these open concept interconnected green spaces in the neighbourhood.”*

Meanwhile, although Daniels attempted to incorporate urban agriculture and acknowledge the importance of community gardening by installing planters next to the Regent Park Community Garden on Sackville Street, the infrastructure was poorly designed and implemented and ultimately contradicts its original purpose. During our interviews, we learned that these four elevated planters were specifically designed for wheelchair users. However, their design in reality is highly impractical as they are too high off the ground; even standing next to them, individuals can find them uncomfortably high to work with, regardless of physical ability. This lack of accessibility and usability highlights a disconnect between planning and actual community needs, making it difficult for residents, especially those with mobility challenges and disabilities, children, and the elderly, to engage in meaningful gardening activities.

Lastly, there is concern among residents about new residents who are moving into market-rate housing. Generally, people who move into the higher cost market rate condos are more financially stable than residents who depend on social and rent-assisted housing. As a result, there is less of a need for new and more well-off residents to garden since they do not struggle as much with groceries as marginalized and low-income residents do. During our interview with Sunday, she spoke about this issue:

*“If residents and newcomers to the community, like new buyers, don’t care that much [about*

*gardening], then it’s not going to happen. That’s what I’ve seen so far, is that I’m one of the few people that remember those consultations [about gardening], you know, and how important urban [agriculture] was, but it’s hard to maintain that when it’s no longer a tight-knit community. Now that [there are new residents], they’re more upwardly mobile. They’re not caring so much about gardening at home.”*

Even if there is interest in gardening from new residents, Sunday cautions that new gardening spaces may become subscription-based to access, which would be detrimental to long-time residents who have been gardening for years:

*“If both Tridel and Daniels [the private companies behind the revitalization] have that approach of moving gardening to the roof, then there will be some. I think what’s happened, even with the Daniels buildings, is that people are paying for the garden space. It’s a paid amenity [now], compared to the community gardens, which was like maybe \$20 a year, or something like that. Now it’s maybe like \$20 a month. So you might feel like you can’t save enough money by gardening to pay for that, for that space, right? Like it’s a different dynamic.”*

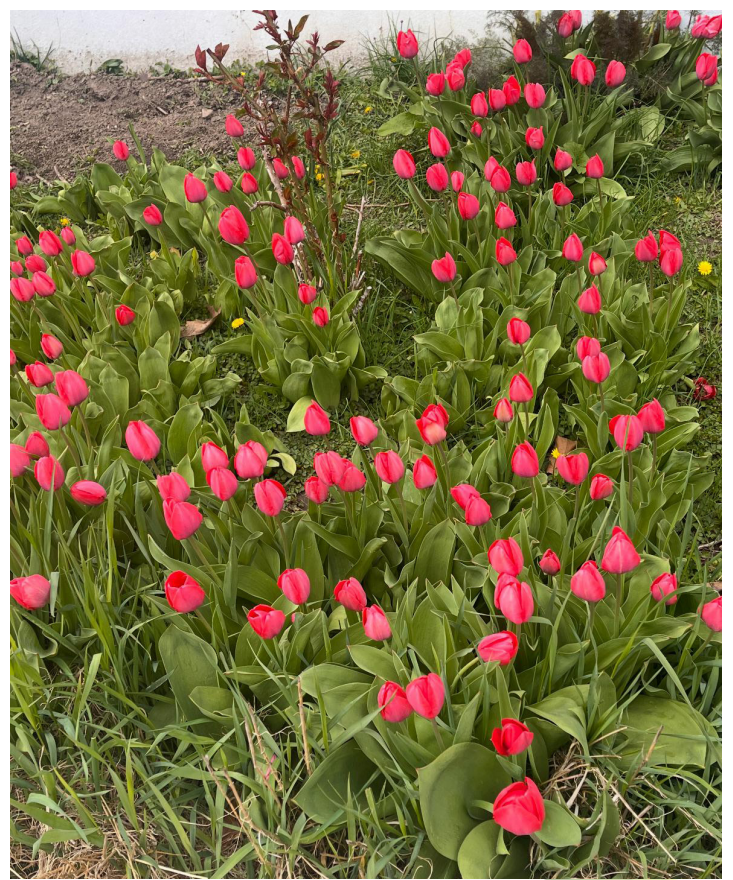
Putting what is essentially an arbitrary paywall on a vital practice that residents have relied on for years at no additional costs will impact many in the neighbourhood and will also affect the future of gardening in Regent Park and perhaps the broader city. If paying to garden is normalized, we will lose what makes community gardening so great and advantageous to neighbourhoods.



*The flower beds in the new community garden.  
Photo Credit: Saima Islam*

## An Uncertain Future for Garden(er)s

Regent Park is currently grappling with a sense of uncertainty on multiple fronts. One concern raised by Sayed Laskar is the possibility that the new building he's set to move into in the coming months may no longer have available space in its green roof garden plots. He shares that he feels entitled to a guaranteed spot, given his long-standing contributions to the community's green spaces through over two decades of gardening. "I deserve a spot because I have already an existing garden, and I spent my own money to build this garden because each rose cost me \$14.99 because nobody is spending their own money for flowers [for the building]" he says. Years of personal effort, care, and love for the neighbourhood have helped make Laskar's current building at 259 Sumach a standout, especially when his flowers are in full bloom. He takes great pride in his work, and many residents



affectionately know him as the uncle who plants flowers.

*Flowers planted by Sayed Laskar in front of 259 Sumach St. Photos by Faizah Uddin, a resident and neighbour in the same building.*

Residents like Sayed Laskar, who are being relocated as part of Regent Park's ongoing revitalization, are bracing for the quiet loss of things that often go unnoticed—like backyard gardens. For Sayed, a man who has poured more than two decades of care into cultivating beauty in the community through flowers, this loss feels especially personal. Over a month ago, he reached out to the person responsible for managing green roof garden plots in his soon-to-be new building. He has yet to hear anything back. The silence has been disheartening, a sharp contrast to the warmth and immediacy he once experienced at his current residence, 259 Sumach.

It was nothing more than a casual conversation that helped Sayed start his garden. A simple verbal ask to his superintendent at 259 Sumach was all it took. He was met with encouragement and enthusiasm, and when Sayed explained that he would need a hose connected to a water source of some sort, the superintendent responded within a week and were happy to oblige. There were no forms, no waiting, no bureaucracy, just a recognition of a resident's dedication and a willingness to support it.

That level of responsiveness and care now feels absent in the relocation process. As the neighbourhood moves toward the future, Sayed is left wondering if there will still be room for the roots he's spent a lifetime growing.

In a conversation with Sayed's daughter, a friend and a familiar face in the neighbourhood growing up, she mentioned how her father is unsure of whether or not he will continue gardening at all after the move if he does not receive a plot. There just simply is not enough space for the amount of demand, and the loss of gardening

space in Regent Park is noticeable from a simple walk in the neighbourhood. Allotment sizes in community gardens such as the one in the big park are smaller than the yard gardens in just one old building, which is shared across numerous tenants. Additionally, many of the newer gardens are taking the form of green roofs, which raises questions of accessibility in actually acquiring garden beds as experienced by Sayed.

For years, discussions about funding and power dynamics have stifled progress on sustaining these essential green spaces. The numerous stakeholders involved in the process lack a sense of governance and hierarchy, which can prove to be a problem as described by Sunday Harrison. For example, in early 2020, the amalgamation of two community organizations, the Christian Resource Centre (CRC) and Fred Victor took place.<sup>3</sup> Both have similar missions of creating positive change for homeless and low-income people living across Toronto. They both offer programs for housing and food security, mental health, and more, which was the reason for the merger. And while the merger allows for a strengthened organization altogether and an expansion of services, there are still a few gaps to fill 5 years later. When asked about regulation on the greenhouse, Sunday talks about the fickleness of accessibility:

*"We're not really sure what's going on over there, because the city ... originally had a partnership with CRC at 40 Oak, and then when the merger with Fred Victor happened, we're not sure if they have really settled on a partnership with the city at the greenhouse."*

At the moment, there is no clear indication of which organization holds managerial responsibility for the greenhouse. There are

no posted hours of operation, no contact information, and no clarity on who residents or community groups like Green Thumbs should reach out to for access or collaboration. Despite the ambiguity, Green Thumbs still holds a key to the space, from before the merger. It's a small privilege they've maintained over time, so when the weather allows, they get to gardening plants that can withstand the cold. However, when it comes to organizing events, the lack of a clear point of contact becomes a major hurdle. As Sunday from Green Thumbs explains, this uncertainty has made collaboration increasingly difficult, and it greatly limits the potential of what the space could offer to the wider community:

*"I'm trying to have an event there at the end of April, and I can't find who's responsible, like the city workers, you know, point me, like, go, go. And Fred Victor, like, you know, they're on vacation."*

This problem alludes to larger issues present in urban agriculture, and also the challenging nature of the work done by charitable organizations in general. Often the way these things work is community organizations like Fred Victor and CRC get permits from the city to operate garden amenities. But over the past few years, the cost of permit prices has risen drastically. Permit costs for these amenities have gone up from \$1,000 to \$4,000,<sup>4</sup> which is also a direct result of the increase in the market value of the land in Regent Park since the previous lease was negotiated with organizations and the city.

This constant redirection of who to get permission from is a frustrating barrier to the gardener's experience, and it isn't the only one. Community members like Sunday, who have been part of these revitalization conversations



for decades, fear that the changes and challenges brought upon the neighbourhood gardens might permanently uproot a long-standing tradition of urban farming. Commenting on other failures of the redevelopment, Sunday talks about accessibility in terms of safety, mobility, and even the acquisition of gardening spaces. The current Green Thumbs space in Daniels Spectrum resides on the third floor of the building with a large green roof.<sup>5</sup> With 5 inches of soil spanning across the roof<sup>5</sup> and aspirations to be a productive urban farm for the community, the soil on the roof of Daniels Spectrum has no visitors aside from Green Thumbs staff. Over 10 years after the completion of Daniels Spectrum's construction,<sup>6</sup> the green roof's shortcoming is its absence of a safety railing, making it unavailable to the public. Sunday explains how the lack of a safety railing puts a pin in their plans for community programming.

*"We have no insurance... if anybody fell off the roof, we'd be toast."* Photo Credits: Saima Islam

Similar to the greenhouse, the railings are not an immediate fix. With a cost of approximately \$70,000, Green Thumbs has begun fundraising for a safety railing, applying to provincial grants,

and trying to garner support to get a railing in place so they can finally begin to involve residents in gardening on the green roof.

Numerous questions linger in the minds of gardeners in Regent Park, where the demand for space is not invisible. Where will they garden next, when will they find out, who should they turn to?

## The Future of Community Gardens in Regent Park

Looking ahead, the future of backyard and community gardens in Regent Park remains an open question for residents and developers to answer. Residents and gardeners in Regent Park like Sayed and Nadia hope for the neighbourhood to preserve and expand green spaces, where rooftop gardens, yard plots, and greenhouses are seamlessly woven into the fabric of new buildings. “These gardens don’t take up much space,” he says, pointing out how even a few extra plots could go a long way in meeting rising demand. And that demand is real, residents are eager not only to grow food but to maintain their intergenerational relationships with the soil as well.

Sunday highlights that while the Daniels corporation has tried to incorporate urban agriculture into the existing phases of the redevelopment, a lot of actual agricultural knowledge was lost. She says that it’s not that community input was entirely ignored during revitalization planning, but the lived experience and agricultural knowledge of longtime gardeners weren’t fully integrated into the final designs.

“Somehow that knowledge base did not translate into the built environment, and that’s my concern going forward, is that, you know, gardeners know what they need, and residents know what they want, but like what? Where’s our power, right? We have to mobilize to get what we need.”

Groups like Green Thumbs proposed a vision of converting the now-decommissioned boiler room in Regent Park to a fully functioning greenhouse for year-round use with programming and making productive use of land slated for development. For years, there have been conversations amongst designers and developers about preserving the boiler room structure as a cultural heritage building, and how it can be repurposed. Sunday believes turning it into a greenhouse could do meaningful work for food literacy in the neighbourhood, and use it as a resource for education, growth, and connection, especially for residents old and new alike.

Questions of power and whose voices ultimately shape the neighbourhood loom large. Tridel, the development partner for the remaining phases of the revitalization, has a reputation for supporting community gardens. The last phase of redevelopment is an opportunity to strengthen that commitment by prioritizing active, accessible, and inclusive spaces that center residents’ needs. What residents are asking for isn’t extravagant. More plots, clearer communication, implementation of ecological knowledge, and more room to grow Regent Park.

# Growing Community Through Hyper-local Journalism



By Adonis Huggins  
Executive Director, FOCUS Media Arts Centre

## FOCUS Media Arts Centre - A Platform for Local Voices

FOCUS Media Arts Centre (FOCUS) is a not-for-profit organization and registered charity committed to media literacy and participatory media practices. Founded in 1990 to counter harmful negative stereotypes of Regent Park perpetuated by mainstream media, FOCUS now operates:

- Radio Regent, a 24-hour volunteer-run internet radio station,
- Catch da Flava, a journalistic e-newsletter serving the community,
- Regent Park TV, a youth-led film-making program and YouTube channel.

One of Regent Park TV's cornerstone initiatives is the Regent Park TV News, which includes both long-form journalistic videos and until recently a biweekly news broadcast known as Regent Park TV Weekly News, or RPTV Weekly.

## RPTV Weekly: Journalism for the Community, by the Community

The RPTV weekly news project ran from December of 2022 to December of 2025 through funding support from the City of Toronto's Social Development Fund and the United Way's Social Impact Fund.

The funding was developed to resource projects that strengthen social cohesion and inclusion between and among, rent-geared-to-income tenants and newly arrived market rental residents and condominium owners.

RPTV Weekly News was a 45- to 60-minute news cast that provided residents with regular, accessible coverage of the local events, stories, and issues impacting on Regent Park and the surrounding area. A dedicated team of four full-time journalists — two of whom were long-time residents with no prior media training — led production.

They handled researching, reporting, interviewing, filming, editing, and scriptwriting, while also training, mentoring and working alongside local volunteers.

Reporters, anchors, and editors were often youth interns from local high schools or adult residents of Regent Park. Volunteers were encouraged to pitch and produce stories reflecting their lived experiences and interests.

One standout contributor was Thundercloud, an Indigenous resident who regularly produced segments highlighting Indigenous culture and perspectives within the neighbourhood.

## **Celebrating Community Culture and Identity**

Grounded in principles of accessibility, representation, and grassroots storytelling, RPTV Weekly provided a platform for agencies, grassroots groups, and residents to showcase their events, festivals, and activities.

Regular coverage featured events such as:

Sunday in the Park, Moss Park Festival, Cultural Bazaar, Moonlight Market, Taste of Regent Park, Black History Month celebrations, the Regent

Park Film Festival, Journey Home musical, United Football League, Show Love Festival, Ramadan and Eid celebrations, and an annual youth pow wow.

In the words of one community member FOCUS puts out a lot of material that many in the community turn to for information about the neighbourhood.

By consistently profiling the rich cultural life of Regent Park — its people, customs, art, music, food, and dance — RPTV Weekly served as a cultural bridge – connecting residents of diverse faiths and backgrounds, and fostering understanding among social housing tenants, market renters, and condo owners alike. The newscasts became a weekly reminder of the vibrant, multilingual, and multicultural fabric that defines Regent Park.

## **A Tool for Civic Engagement**

Beyond cultural storytelling, RPTV Weekly played a crucial civic role. Every episode included summaries of local meetings and decisions made by key stakeholders.





These included:

Toronto Community Housing (which acts as both landlord and Master Developer for the area);  
City development staff working in the area;  
the City Councillor and other elected representatives at all levels of government;  
the Regent Park Social Development Plan working groups;  
the Executive Directors Network representing senior management of agencies in the area;  
the Regent Park Neighbourhood Association.

The newscast also tackled pressing issues such as:

the ongoing revitalization of Regent Park,  
community safety,  
food insecurity,  
homelessness,  
harm reduction,  
Black Lives Matter,  
Indigenous rights & concerns,

These stories often featured interviews with city staff, political representatives, community leaders, and activists. For viewers seeking more in-depth coverage, long-form video features were made available on the Regent Park TV YouTube channel.

**Building Connection and Opportunity**  
Each episode of RPTV Weekly concluded with announcements about job and training opportunities and upcoming community events. These listings served as a vital resource for newcomers, job seekers, seniors, single parents, and others seeking to break isolation and build connections.

## Community Impact

Over its three-year run, RPTV Weekly:

- Engaged 45 volunteers
- Produced 101 biweekly news segments
- Featured over 600 news stories
- Promoted over 400 community events
- Reached 2,000+ YouTube subscribers

# A Final Reflection

By amplifying resident voices, documenting local events, and reporting on governance and policy, RPTV Weekly strengthened civic engagement and deepened residents' sense of ownership and belonging. RPTV Weekly, along with the long-form news shows, was a trusted platform for advocacy, storytelling and empowerment.

Although RPTV Weekly is currently on pause due to a lapse in funding, long-form news coverage on Regent Park TV continues. In a city where most neighbourhoods lack any local journalism, Regent Park TV offers a powerful model of how hyper-local media can empower communities, foster inclusion, and hold local power to account.

What would our cities look like if every neighbourhood had the tools to tell its own story?

Regent Park has shown us what's possible. The next step is to ensure these models of grassroots media aren't the exception — but the norm.

**You can view all past episodes  
of RPTV Weekly News by  
scanning the QR Code**



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## Want to Contribute To The Next Issue?

If you would like to submit content to Catch da Flava's Regent Park newspaper, contact us at: [info@focusmediaarts.ca](mailto:info@focusmediaarts.ca)

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