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Mapping displacement through lived experiences:
Countermapping transit-induced gentrification in Kitchener-Waterloo, Ontario

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Abstract

This article seeks to enhance our understanding of the role transit infrastructure plays in shaping patterns of gentrification and displacement by directly engaging with residents living along a new light rail transit (LRT) line who are affected by these processes. Displacement is difficult, if not impossible to statistically measure, yet much of the literature on transit-induced gentrification relies on quantitative analysis. Our approach is based on a collaboration between academic and non-academic partners that assembles, analyses and amplifies the experiences of marginalised residents in order to shift planning, policy and political conversations about the nature of change within our region. Through interviews with approximately fifty low-income residents living along a new LRT corridor in Waterloo Region, we analyse patterns, processes and experiences of displacement and the loss of already existing affordable housing. This information has been mapped to produce narratives that counter the dominant views which have celebrated an urban revival along the LRT corridor. Our research emphasises the need to incorporate lived experiences of displacement into central positions within the debates that make and shape cities.

Keywords

Displacement, gentrification, lived experiences, renoviction, counter-mapping, Waterloo Region

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Introduction – Dan's story

Dan spoke with us from the Radisson Hotel in the east end of Kitchener, which, during the COVID-19 pandemic, was used as emergency homeless accommodation. Dan is retirement age, and has moved over a dozen times over the past decade. His moves were due to a variety of factors, including theft, bad maintenance, issues with landlords, unsafe conditions and lack of rent. However, many of the places he has lived have been demolished or renovated as a wave of gentrification is sweeping across downtown Kitchener. In addition to telling us about his own experiences, Dan shared his knowledge of these places—predominantly rooming houses and small apartments—what they were like to live in and how they ended up disappearing from the supply of affordable housing for people like him.

After winding up in the shelter system, Dan was given a one-way bus ticket to Windsor, three hours away, and was told he could not come back to Waterloo Region. In Windsor, housing costs were cheaper, but he faced even more difficulty finding an apartment and navigating an unfamiliar social services system. Landlords would not accept his disability payment. After being beaten up in a shelter, he returned to Waterloo, where at least he had a support network.

Dan's story is not unique. But his, and other stories like it, are rarely heard in planning, policy and political decision-making about housing and urban development along Waterloo Region's much-celebrated LRT corridor. Also absent from these conversations are both the lived experiences of people such as Dan, as well as the detailed knowledge they have about the changes taking place within their community.

Dan lives in Waterloo Region, one of Canada's fastest growing urban areas. Situated 100km west of Toronto, the region is an upper-tier municipality consisting of three cities—Kitchener, Waterloo and Cambridge—and four rural townships, and has a population of around 620,000. Gentrification has been changing the economic and social character of the downtown areas for the past decade, spurred to a large extent by the development of a Light Rail Transit (LRT) line, which opened in 2019 (Doucet 2021), as well as a growing cluster of tech-businesses, including a large office for Google. To date, more than $4 billion has been invested along the LRT corridor, most of which is in the form of new condominium developments.

This article is a product of a research partnership between academic and non-academic researchers and advocates based at the University of Waterloo, and the Social Development Centre Waterloo Region (SDC), a charitable non-profit, social planning and community development organization that focuses on advancing social justice and documenting the lived experiences of poverty and homelessness. The goal of our partnership is to amplify the voices, knowledge and lived experiences of marginalised residents in order for them to play a central role in shaping housing policy and planning. Rather than relying on official statistics, which underestimate direct, spatial displacement (Chapple and Loukaitou-Sideris, 2019; Newman and Wyly, 2006) and are incapable of capturing indirect, exclusionary, nonspatial or experiential forms of displacement (Slater, 2009; Easton et al., 2019; Atkinson, 2015), we draw our knowledge from the lived experiences of residents affected by gentrification and

displacement. This is important because increasingly in Ontario and elsewhere, the housing crisis is being reframed as a supply crisis whose solutions rely on market-driven responses (see Chapple and Burda, 2022; Doucet, 2022). Our interviews have led to the creation of a map[1] that identifies some of the affordable housing that has been lost through demolition or renovation (Diwan et al., 2021). This map serves as a powerful counternarrative to the visual mapping of new developments and the celebratory tone of change taking place in core urban neighbourhoods (see Maharawal and McElroy, 2018).

Building on previous research (Doucet, 2021; Turman et al., 2021), our aim is to assemble this knowledge and these experiences in order to paint a more complete picture of displacement and the loss of affordable housing within core urban neighbourhoods in Kitchener and Waterloo (the two cities served by the LRT). The three objectives that guide this article include to 1) identify gaps in current official (quantitative) data that are unable to fully capture the extent of contemporary gentrification and displacement; 2) assemble and amplify the knowledge and lived experiences of those living through gentrification and displacement in order to render visible specific trends and processes of displacement and the loss of affordable housing; and 3) enhance planning, policy and political debates by centring these perspectives and this knowledge within them.

The remainder of this article is structured as follows: the next section provides an overview of literature on documenting gentrification and displacement. We then introduce our research methods and contextualise Kitchener-Waterloo. Our empirical analysis is divided into two parts. The first examines two forms of erosion of existing affordable housing that were regularly discussed in interviews: demolition and renoviction. The second explores some non-spatial aspects of displacement. Finally, our conclusion provides some recommendations and insights for a more equitable housing policy which have been suggested by our participants.

Documenting experiences and patterns of gentrification and displacement

On the one hand, gentrification and displacement are major contributors to the loss of existing affordable housing, particularly close to good transit (Chapple and Loukaitou-Sideris, 2019; Jones, 2020; Deka, 2017; Dong, 2017; Immergluck and Balan, 2018). On the other hand, there is also little evidence to indicate that the upzoning and intensification which follows the construction of an LRT produces the kind of housing that is affordable to those with low- or very-low incomes (Rodriguez-Pose and Storper, 2020; Freemark, 2020). Jones (2020) and Jones and Ley (2016) clearly demonstrate how the arrival of higher order transit leads to the upzoning of station areas, especially those with low-rise rental apartments, resulting in the displacement of low-income households. This represents both direct displacement—older, low-rise rental buildings are demolished and their tenants forced out—and exclusionary displacement, meaning that the new units within the denser developments are too expensive for low-income households. For critical researchers and advocates, two

[1] For a link to our interactive displacement map, see: https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/43112521f46a45bcac89ba849f40a0ee

inter-related challenges are how to document this loss, and how to prevent further displacement and erosion of affordable housing?

Displacement can be conceptualised as both a one-time *event* involving spatial outmigration (Grube Cavers and Patterson, 2015), or a much more complex and longer-term *process* that severs one's connection to place through a combination of spatial, experiential and political dispossessions (Atkinson, 2016; Rankin and McLean, 2015). Many scholars have used statistics to measure the spread and extent of gentrification (Walks and Maaranen, 2008; Nilson and Delmele, 2018). However, displacement is much more difficult to measure, and not all forms show up in statistics (Elliot-Cooper, et al., 2020; Easton, 2020; Slater, 2009). This is because in order to quantify displacement, it must be treated as an *event* that can be measured (see Grube Cavers and Patterson, 2015). This runs against a growing body of scholarship that conceptualises displacement and gentrification as spatial and temporal *processes* that are experienced (Doucet, 2021; Marcuse, 1986; Davidson, 2009; Doucet and Koenders, 2018; Atkinson, 2015; Paton, 2014; Elliot-Cooper et al., 2020). While using data such as the census to measure gentrification can provide indications of broad trends about when and where gentrification is happening (see Brown, 2016; Deka, 2017; Nilson and Delmele, 2018; Walks and Maraanen, 2008), this approach often misses important details, fine-grained changes, political economies, power-relations, and—important for our research—the interactions, conflicts and struggles between landlords and tenants that either result in displacement, or create inhospitable living conditions for many marginalised residents (see Easton et al., 2020; Elliot-Cooper, et al., 2020; Lees et al., 2008; Slater, 2009; Revington, 2015). As both Newman and Wyly (2006) and Loukaitou-Sideris et al (2019) have found, quantitative analysis significantly *under-estimates* the scale of gentrification-induced displacement.

Therefore, a lived experience approach to understanding displacement is necessary in order to both provide a fuller account of the range of displacement patterns, as well as highlight and render visible the experiential, psychological and phenomenological forms of displacement that are not accounted for in most conventional statistics (Ellis-Young and Doucet, 2021). This is important because contemporary critical scholarship conceptualises displacement as a rupture between people and place. This can take on many forms; Atkinson (2015) uses the phrase 'unhoming' to describe not only forced outmigration, but also the physical and social changes occurring while remaining in neighbourhoods that are changing. Shaw and Hagemans (2015) speak of a loss of place, which is not only connected to housing, but a sense of loss and exclusion as shops, amenities and meeting spaces gentrify around them. Valli's (2015) finds that there are many symbolic aspects of displacement that occur when gentrification results in economic, social and ethnic changes. As Kern (2016) notes, this can be a process of 'slow violence' that gradually transforms familiar and welcoming spaces into unfamiliar and unwelcoming ones.

Within this, there is a small body of literature that articulates how planning decisions made in the present can lead to spatial and nonspatial displacement in the future. Sakizlioglu (2014) articulates how living under threat of displacement can be a very traumatic experience fraught with loss in both the present and the future. Jones and Ley (2016) interviewed

residents living near transit stations in Vancouver and found that they felt threatened by upzoning regulations that would likely result in their older, lower-rent apartments being demolished to make way for intensification and transit-oriented development. Related to this, Rankin and McLean (2015) examine how top-down visions for the future of a neighbourhood can constitute a form of displacement and erasure when these planning agendas render invisible low-income, marginalised and racialised voices within the community.

While most critical studies of displacement rely on interviews or observations, there is a growing body of scholarship that uses counter-mapping to track the spread of displacement and identify areas that could be subject to future displacement. Chapple and Zuk (2016) developed a series of metrics to produce an 'early warning systems' that can help fight against gentrification. Building on this, Chapple et al (2020) created the Urban Displacement Project which conducts data-driven, community-centred and applied research to better understand the nature of gentrification and displacement in major global cities around the world. Based on changes in data variables over time, they have developed a typology of neighbourhoods based on the presence of gentrification, or their risk of gentrification and have also focused on the role transit plays in shaping patterns of gentrification and displacement (Chapple and Loukaitou-Sideris, 2019).

The most relevant mapping project for our research partnership is the *Anti-Eviction Mapping Project (AEMP),* which describes itself as 'a data-visualization, critical cartography, and multimedia storytelling collective documenting dispossession and resistance upon gentrifying landscapes' (see https://antievictionmap.com/; Maharawal and McElroy, 2018). Part in parcel with their mapping work is an oral history project which seeks to portray those who have been evicted not as victims, but rather as activists and actors in processes of urban change. Their counter-mapping project emerged in response to the many maps produced during the tech boom that emerged around 2011 and rendered invisible many communities and places. Our map has also emerged in a similar context of a local tech-boom –aided by strategical investments by local governments- that has contributed to the rapid development of new condominium towers, as well as new office spaces and amenities for tech workers (Edge et al., 2020). Maharawal and McElroy (2018) argue that places are visualised as areas of conflict and struggle, and that counter-mapping is a political act that should also be accompanied by action. Their work seeks to not only document what has been lost, but also build collectivity among the participants in the project.

The approaches and methodologies in our own partnership have been inspired by the AEMP. In addition to mapping displacement in Kitchener-Waterloo, we have also created an online oral history project to document the lived experiences of low-income residents that would otherwise go unrecorded. The amplification of these perspectives and experiences within housing policy debates at the local and regional level has been central to our work. As we will discuss later, these efforts are contributing to tangible shifts in planning conversations. Before we turn to that, the following sections outline the work we have done and the knowledge we have assembled.

Methods, approaches and case study

As we have noted, this research is part of wider collaborations between university and non-university partners. For this analysis of mapping displacement within core urban neighbourhoods of Kitchener-Waterloo, we conducted two rounds of interviews: the first in the spring of 2019 involved nineteen participants, and the second was conducted between May and September 2020. These latter interviews also discussed housing challenges due to the pandemic (see Turman et al., 2021). Interview participants were recruited through posters at local non-profits and community spaces, media and social media appearances and through a network of *community connectors* that collaborate with the Social Development Centre Waterloo Region. These individuals have worked with the SDC for many years and have built up trust through networks of Black, Indigenous, people of colour, LGBTQ+ and other marginalised and under-resourced populations. Many community connectors were also interviewed themselves, both because of their lived experiences and because of the knowledge they possess about changes taking place within their communities. They also serve as the first point of contact for many peers when their housing is in jeopardy, due to their connections with community organisations such as the SDC.

Interviews were recorded, professionally transcribed and analysed in NVivo by the research team, which included both academic and non-academic partners. Interview coding also included geographic locations which formed the basis of the mapping project. Some of the 2019 interviews were also edited for length and included in the *Life Stories of Displacement* Oral History project.[2]

Interviews focused on personal experiences with housing, gentrification and displacement, and the knowledge that participants have of changes taking place within their communities. As was noted previously, much of this information is not rendered visible within official statistics (Doucet, 2021) and is therefore absent from key decision-making processes. To map displacement in Kitchener-Waterloo, we used Esri's ArcGIS Map Online and ArcGIS Story Maps programs. Locations that were highlighted in the interviews were then transferred onto the map. Instances of displacement and the loss of affordable housing were indicated on the map; where possible, quotations from our interviews, or audio clips (including transcripts) were included. Additional information included photographs, Google Street View images, particularly of sites before demolition or renovation took place and media links to any relevant news items about the sites in question. We also included the total number of housing units lost, if known. Our map is limited to the knowledge and information of our participants and does not purport to paint a complete picture of the full extent of displacement along the LRT line. Instead, the map helps to move beyond anecdotes and see the bigger pictures and trends. The interviews and oral histories complement the map by providing more detail about how displacement happens and what this means for tenants, information that can then be included within the map itself.

[2] For a link to the Lifestories of Displacement Oral History project, see: http://www.waterlooregion.org/life-stories-of-displacement

Mapping Displacement

'They knocked down eight or nine houses for that. And then they'll put up condos that the people in the houses couldn't possibly afford.' – Kate[3]

Our interviews identified 148 locations where there was a loss of housing that was affordable to people with low-incomes, with 122 of these within one kilometre of the LRT line. Two patterns were most common: renovations of existing properties (renovictions) and the demolition of properties in order to make way for new developments (demovictions). While only part of the overall picture, it becomes clear that these losses are not isolated incidents, but are part of wider patterns that are rarely rendered visible through statistical analysis alone (cf Region of Waterloo, 2019).

Demolition

In mainstream planning, the net addition of new dwelling units, particularly around transit, is generally seen as a positive. Ontario's current housing goal is to construct 1.5 million new homes over the coming decade, without any major directives as to who those houses should be for, and how much they should cost. One key aspect of this is increasing density around transit stations. Therefore, public investment in transit is meant not only to move people, but also to spur investment, increase density and curb sprawl (Olesen, 2020; Hess, 2020; Baker and Lee, 2019). However, when new developments are built, there are often other structures that are demolished (Jones and Ley, 2016). In mainstream planning and policymaking, these spaces are often perceived to be 'empty' and can easily be forgotten by those who do not use them (Doucet, 2021). However, when speaking with low-income residents, it is clear that these spaces were anything but empty. Two examples help to produce a counter-narrative about change along the LRT corridor by rendering visible what has been lost to make way for new developments. In both instances, it is important to stress that the housing units lost were private-market rentals and not subsidised units, public housing or other forms of government-supported housing. This is important because waiting times for subsidised housing can be more than seven years, resulting in many very low-income residents residing within the private market. Many of these demolished units tend to be small apartments buildings, rooming houses or formerly single-family housing that were subdivided into apartments. In some cases, these dwellings exist above ground-floor retail units and commercial premises.

The first example of a cluster of demolished dwellings is at King Street West and Louisa Street in Kitchener. This site is directly on the LRT line and is now the location of Midtown Lofts, a 138-unit condominium developed by Condo Culture. The six-storey single-use building also contains a private parkette, an outdoor terrace, off-street parking and a fitness facility. Its units are a mix of studios, one- and two-bedroom units. Prior to this, the site was home to two rental houses on Louisa Street, and a small row of shops, with apartments

[3] While many participants consented to having their names used as part of the research and oral history project, for this article, we use pseudonyms.

above on King Street West. In 2015, the properties on this corner were demolished in preparation for the new condominium. This was also when construction began on the LRT tracks running down the middle of King Street. Approximately fifteen units of housing were lost from all the properties demolished to make way for the new condo.

Several respondents commented on this site. While none lived in these units, respondents had knowledge of people who had been forced to leave when they were demolished. Mike commented on what losses such as this meant to them and the opportunities they had within the city:

> It used to be a much older apartment building, smaller as well. It was an affordable place to live ... It was a place you could live if you were on Ontario Works (OW), financial assistance, or you only worked part time. Looking at it now, the rent has got to start at around $1,200/month. It's just one more place in my city where I can't afford to live anymore; a lot of people couldn't afford to live at. It's upsetting.

Spaces such as these constitute some of the most affordable housing options within the city. The gradual erosion of this housing means that there are fewer options for very low-income people, as noted by one of our respondents: 'But there were other people in those buildings that had to go and find a place. And with the price of apartments going up, you couldn't find cheap apartments like that now.' Throughout the LRT corridor, all the sites that were identified by our participants saw (or will see) net gains in housing units, however, there are no provisions for any kind of housing that is affordable to those with low- or even moderate-incomes.

The second example is a cluster of small, older homes that was demolished in 2019 to make way for a new development on the former site of the Ontario Die Company (ODC). The ODC occupied a large property at the corner of Roger Street and Moore Avenue in Waterloo, less than one kilometre from the previous example and only a five-minute walk from an LRT stop. The eighty-year-old ODC building was demolished and is being converted into a new mid-rise development of 242 units (421 bedrooms). Included in this redevelopment site were six single family homes and a triplex on Roger Street, which were all owned by ODC and were rented out. These seven buildings were also demolished to clear the site for development. Dale, who lives down the street from the ODC site noted:

> More and more gentrification … A whole bunch of single-family dwellings at the end of my street were demolished to make way for a gigantic condo complex looking over the cemetery … They knocked down houses and they'll put up condos that the people in the houses couldn't possibly afford.

The new development is called Spur Line Common, which is a reference to the eponymous railway line and recreational trail situated 250 metres from the site. Spur Line Common's marketing speaks to this gentrification, rather than its working-class past. The project is a mix of suites and townhomes; its website promotes the project by stating: 'If you are looking for a place to be among a like-minded crowd, check out Spur Line Common in Midtown KW. Your people are already here enjoying life—find them working in their gardens,

watching their kids play in corner parks or chatting with other locals at the café' (Reid's Heritage Homes, n.d).

These two examples are the largest clusters of already-existing affordable housing that have been demolished to make way for new developments that were highlighted by our participants. But they are by no means the only examples. A project by Drewlo Holdings, a company that specialises in luxury rental units resulted in at least two rooming houses being demolished for a new development opposite the Kitchener Market. In UpTown Waterloo, three rental houses and a small business were knocked down to make way for the One28 project by CTN Developments, a company whose website is in English and Chinese and promotes the city as a place to invest, as well as the lifestyle attributes of the new condos. While some demolition makes the news—often in passing where the core of the article discusses what will be built (Outhit, 2018)—most of these demolitions either go unnoticed in planning, policy and political debates, or are celebrated for adding new housing and density to the urban core.

A major challenge in documenting these losses is that official statistics neither keep track of the number of housing units lost to demolition, nor what happens to their occupants. This is where knowledge from residents and community members is essential to rendering visible these loses. Our analysis reveals the steady erosion of housing that is affordable to people with low-incomes along the LRT corridor.

Renovation (Renoviction)

The second dominant (and more common) pattern is renoviction: the renovation and upgrading of existing dwellings that result in the eviction/displacement of existing tenants and the subsequent raising of rents. Respondents either had personal experiences with renovictions, or knew of family and friends who have been displaced this way. Maggie, who lived in the same location in downtown Kitchener for twelve years, noted this trend and how her low-income neighbours were being displaced:

> I've seen a lot of our people [get] booted out because they renovated the place and [new people] moved people in, landlords charged them more, and they're high-class people [moving in]. And they build them up just looking real modern and everything.

When asked how low-income tenants end up leaving buildings that are going to be renovated, Peggy told us:

> they basically said they were going to be overhauling or redoing them, and everybody had to get out. And when they do them up the rent's going to go higher so they have to take new tenants in. So these ones (tenants) that were there didn't have the opportunity to go back there again after they got it done because they raised the prices and they said they wanted new tenants in. … They told the people I knew that new tenants would be coming in; basically they had to find somewhere else [to live].

While this respondent had not been personally the victim of renovictions, her volunteer work at a local non-profit community meal program, and her work as a community connector with the SDC meant she was aware of the experiences of others within her community.

There have been some high-profile examples of renovictions within the community. However, the knowledge rendered visible from our engagement with marginalised and low-income residents reveals that this pattern is far more widespread than is often portrayed in the media or featured in planning conversations about the nature of change along the LRT corridor. 48 Weber Street West in downtown Kitchener is a prominent example. It had become rundown and housed many people with drug addictions and mental health problems who had very few other options. In 2015, bylaw officers removed everyone from the building, as it was deemed unsafe to live in (bylaw officers are responsible for investigating, administering and enforcing municipal bylaws and applicable provincial statutes. City bylaw officers are responsible for addressing noise complaints and property standards). Four days later, the property was purchased by Urbanfund Corp for $2.4 million; it was subsequently renovated and is now part of Vive Developments, a company that specialises in luxury rentals (Global, 2015). One interviewee knew 48 Weber before it was redeveloped. She noted that:

> It used to have low-income people. Lots of low-income people. Everybody went out of there, now it's all brand-new stuff in there. New walls, new fridges and stoves. Prices went up and these poor people moved out and now they've got people in there that work in offices and everything. [They] moved into these places and now they're done up just like condos. I was in 48 Weber when it was low-income people because I used to have friends in there.

She went on to state that she had an opportunity to see the apartments after they had been renovated and told us that: 'they don't look like the same apartments. They had them all done up real well, and you basically had to have a good job and all this. They put you through the whole routine in order to get in there.'

It can be notoriously difficult to track what happens to people when they leave buildings such as 48 Weber. Local governments do not keep track of populations that are renovicted and it can be difficult to statistically measure this form of displacement, especially if people relocate within the same census tract, which often happens. Therefore, the knowledge that our participants shared with us can provide valuable insights into trends, patterns and processes, even if we cannot count the total number of people who have been victims of renoviction, and statistically analyse where they moved. When asked what happens to people who are forced to leave buildings such as 48 Weber, respondents did have insights and examples, as one community connector explained:

> Well some of them are on the streets, some of them got help by [non-profits such as] Lutherwood, some got help by the St. John's Kitchen; they got a job there and went through the Working Centre with work delivering flyers. But there's a lot that had no chance like that. But now look at 48 Weber today, no low-incomes in there.

It is worth noting that beginning in early 2022, several prominent homeless encampments emerged within Waterloo Region, including one on Weber Street, a mere three blocks away. 48 Weber Street is one notable example of an apartment building that saw its low-income tenants displaced. This was followed by a total renovation of the building, leading to higher rents and its units 'repositioned' towards more affluent residents (see August, 2020; August and Walks, 2018). However, there were other locations identified during our research. Like the units that are demolished to make way for new condominiums or apartment towers, these tend to be smaller properties whose upgrading barely gets noticed, apart from people who are immediately affected by them. One such location was 144-150 King Street West, near Kitchener City Hall. At the base of the building was the Casablanca bookshop, a downtown institution (Waterloo Record, 2012). Above were three stories of apartments that primarily housed low-income people. One respondent had a friend who used to reside there before the building was renovated. She stated that:

> The apartments were all old but they were cheap, heated and everything. My friend lived up there and he was told that all the tenants had to be out within two months' time, that the place was being renovated. [The landlord] had to do all the apartments up. They all had to be renovated. So everybody, not just him, everybody in the place moved. And there was three floors … Well they said they were going to do it up, and you can move back in but the rent would be very, very high. The landlord told him the new people that took it over, that rent's up high now. And they've got security at the bottom to get in, brand-new elevator in the place. All the places are done up with new appliances and everything – doubled its price.

Casablanca closed in 2012 and the apartments above were renovated in 2016. The building was bought by Denzil Properties and renamed 'The Chambers.' The ground floor houses a restaurant and the three residential stories above contain eighteen 'executive' style apartments that were rented at $1,000 to $1,250/month plus utilities once they were renovated, far higher than the previous tenants were paying. An article in The *Waterloo Region Record* noted that 'the units feature hardwood floors, granite counters, stainless steel appliances, new millwork, independent heating and air conditioning for each apartment, and new bathrooms with glass-enclosed showers. There are bike storage and laundry facilities in the building' (Pender, 2016). That same article quoted the co-owner of Denzil Properties Denny Cybalski saying: 'The uptake has been unbelievable. We put them on the market about a month ago. The whole top floor is leased. The second floor is two-thirds leased and we are starting to lease on the first floor, which isn't finished yet … We are finding a cross-section of people that seems to be growing who don't even have vehicles anymore.' The article also noted that many tenants were young people working downtown and that this type of investment into more upmarket real estate was due to decisions made by the City of Kitchener in the mid-2000s to kick-start a post-industrial economy downtown (see Edge, et al., 2020).

It is important to stress that we heard other examples of similar practices and experiences within the urban cores of Kitchener and Waterloo. On either side of 144-150 King Street West, properties have been demolished to make way for new, higher end

developments that have displaced low-income residents from their homes. To the west is the site of the old Mayfair Hotel, which housed many low-income residents until it was demolished in 2015. The site sat empty for a few years and construction is now finishing on a five-storey office building, notable in architecture circles because of its use of timber-frame construction. To the east, a former convenience store, with two floors of apartments above, was demolished in 2019 to make way for a project called Young Condos, which was nearing completion at the end of 2022. In addition to these, there were many examples of single properties that were renovated by turning them from rooming houses or apartments, back into single-family homes that we have included in our map.

Experiences of displacement and housing precarity

Displacement is not just spatial; there is a growing body of literature that highlights the experiential aspects of displacement that can occur even if one is able to remain in situ. Much of this literature focuses on the loss of community, amenities and sense of place (Elliott-Cooper et al., 2020; Atkinson, 2015; Valli, 2015; Kern, 2016; Easton et al., 2019). Our participants noted these factors; however, they also frequently discussed how discrimination and a lack of support also contributed to feelings of loss and powerlessness that severed their connections to their localities.

Discrimination and harassment

Our interviewees shared much information about how they are discriminated against by landlords, authorities and municipal development and enforcement staff. The biggest culprits, however, were landlords, and we heard numerous stories of how landlords try to control tenant behaviour and where discrimination and harassment resulted in inhospitable environments. One notable example was told to us by told by a woman who lived with her partner, both of whom receive ODSP (disability benefits) and have moved several times because of bad landlords:

> They [the landlord] called bylaw on me because I dropped a pot. I didn't make a noise, like I had to live like a monk… They were always doing house inspections or they were doing this, it was like they were living there as well as me.

Bylaw officers and the police were also perceived to be discriminating against low-income and racialized tenants. Our respondents perceived them to be more proactive against renters than enforcing the property and public safety standards of their landlords or nearby homeowners. A Black owner of a downtown Kitchener convenience store that also functioned as a refuge for homeless people explained to us that she received thousands of dollars in parking violations in the alley beside her store. However, after she was evicted from her premises, the parking rules were no longer enforced and a no parking sign was removed. We heard experiences of unequal treatment, leniency in enforcing regular maintenance and safety for tenants, and constant suspicions of infractions or criminal behaviour from landlords, police and bylaw officers. Our interviewees perceived this as some

kind of punishment for being low-income and marginalised residents living in the gentrifying areas of the two cities.

Discrimination also manifested as racism, xenophobia, homophobia, transphobia, ableism and classism. Many participants told us that landlords would not accept applications from tenants after hearing their accents, as illustrated by the following example: 'You send an email and the appointment is scheduled and then when you call, the house that was available a minute ago has suddenly been taken. Once they hear your voice over the phone, it suddenly becomes unavailable.' Finding and retaining housing is a continuing struggle for Indigenous people and they are eight times more likely to experience homelessness (Belanger et al, 2013). Sheree, a 56-year-old Anishinaabe woman, spoke of her experiences of becoming homeless, her evictions, a decade of harassment from landlords, all of which are common experiences among Indigenous Canadians residing in urban areas such as Kitchener-Waterloo: 'And if you aren't one of their favourites you ain't there long. It's hard to get low-income housing, but it's so damn easy to lose it for an Anishinaabe person.' In addition to this, many landlords filter rental applications by performing credit checks and removing people with low credit scores. It is also common to require first- and last-month's rent up front, which ODSP payments cannot cover and many low-income residents cannot afford. While ODSP can guarantee that funds go directly to paying rent, many landlords are hesitant to accept this form of payment, due in part to the stigma of renting to persons on social assistance. We also heard instances where landlords switched from having rent be automatically deducted from ODSP (and therefore securely and automatically transferred into the landlord's bank account each month), to a situation where tenants had to pay the landlord directly. In one instance, a respondent ended up being evicted because their landlord waited until the end of the month to cash their rent cheque, doing this without the knowledge of the tenant. When a cheque would invariably bounce to do insufficient funds, this became grounds to issue an N4 notice for eviction due to non-payment of rent (see Doucet 2021).

In addition to this, our respondents were fully aware of the exclusionary nature of the new developments along the LRT corridor. Even though many new and renovated properties are marketed (or discussed in official planning documents) as 'affordable' or 'attainable' (Region of Waterloo, 2019), participants noted that this housing was neither affordable, nor attainable for them. Matty, a male respondent in his sixties who received disability benefits stated bluntly: 'It's like being invited to a banquet and told you can watch everybody eat, but you can't.' He went on to elaborate:

> we're getting wall-to-wall condos, you know, but they aren't building any units for people like me. [It's like being] on the outside looking in. Because here, I can't even afford rent. It's just a daily grind. I'm seeing all this stuff and all these changes, but none of them are for me. The ODSP disability shelter allowance is $479 per month. You can't rent anything for $479.00. And even when they talk about building affordable housing, which I don't really believe it anyway, it's still not going to be affordable for people like me. When they say affordable I say, Affordable for whom?

Lack of support

Canada's National Housing Strategy Act became law in 2019 and recognises that the right to housing is a fundamental human right. However, our respondents spoke regularly about the lack of support for their right to housing. They regularly talked about how tenants' rights were rarely enforced and how municipal property standards could do far more to ensure their homes were safe places to live. Even worse, that these agencies tended to clamp down on tenants, rather than landlords.

Affordable housing is one of many areas of support that are not keeping pace with the cost of living and current trends and challenges. Many of these issues are not new. The Canadian Federal government stopped directly funding the construction of new affordable housing units in 1994. In 1995, a newly-elected Progressive Conservative Provincial government in Ontario also stopped funding new construction of affordable housing. The drop in the number of new affordable housing units was immediate and dramatic. Data from Toronto showed that between 1971—1981, 23,800 units of rent geared-to-income housing was added; between 1981—1991, 11,800 were added and between 1991—1996, 11,310 units were added. However, between 1996 and 2001, only 1,300 units were added to the city's affordable housing stock (Moos et al., 2018).

As with other issues pertaining to housing, respondents were acutely aware of these policy and political changes. Matty, a long-time advocate, clearly articulated this with reference to his own experiences over several decades:

> This goes back to about 1995 with [Progressive Conservative Premier] Mike Harris. He rolled back OW [welfare] by 22% and he froze ODSP. Well they stayed frozen for 11 years, and during that time we had about 3 or 4% inflation. Then the Liberals came in [in 2003]. They started giving increases of 1% and 2% a year, which were actually less than the rate of inflation. So all the Liberals did for the 13 years that they've in power is they basically maintained their freeze. For an example, when I first moved to Waterloo in 1997, I had just gone on ODSP. I rented—it was a basement apartment in a house but it was like a normal-sized apartment—a kitchen, living room, a bedroom. It was decent. And I paid market rent for the place. This was 1997. I paid $280 a month for rent, and ODSP was like $900 a month. And I was reasonably comfortable. I mean I was still poor but the shelter allowance then, I don't remember what it was but it was probably about $280 a month. Well now it's $479 but the rents have tripled, at least tripled. But the shelter allowance has gone up by $150. You can't rent anything for $479.

In 2021, the low-end of the market for a one-bedroom apartment in Kitchener-Waterloo was over $1,100 a month, which is equivalent to a monthly ODSP allowance of $1,169. This lack of financial support means that many low-income people need to choose between paying rent or buying food. Many of our respondents opted to put a roof over their heads, as the following quotation illustrates: 'My rent comes first. Food; that comes second. I'll eat at the soup kitchen if I have to, you know what I mean? If I don't have the money, my rent comes first. I don't have food money? Oh well. I have to look at it that way.'

As we noted above, as downtown Kitchener is gentrifying, there are fewer housing options for people receiving social assistance within close proximity to the social support systems that do exist there. The main soup kitchens, shelters, social support services and non-profits are predominantly situated in and around downtown Kitchener. Respondents were aware of these gentrification challenges and pressures and noted the mismatch between where (the small amounts of) new affordable housing are being built (outside the core) and where the resources and support networks are located. They also noted how the LRT contributed to a new bus network that feeds into train stations, rather than operating directly into the downtown core, as was the case before the line opened. For many low-income residents, even if they live on a bus line (which is not always a given), this necessitates at least one transfer to reach downtown. One respondent who was still living downtown was facing displacement pressures with the understanding that if they had to move, they would be taken away from the networks and communities they relied on:

> I feel like everything that's happening around here right now is forcing the poor people out of downtown, where all their resources are. You know, for example, the Working Centre, the employment resource centre at 235 King, [meal programs at] the St John's Soup Kitchen, and Ray of Hope. Like I still have to use them. I can't afford to live in my rooming house, I'm barely getting by and I feel like they're just trying to get rid of us. Like that's what's going on. We don't have enough money to live in these brand new beautiful looking buildings. I wish I could, but I don't.

It is also worth noting what residents did not speak about in interviews. Two of the official channels that tenants have to defend their rights are the Landlord and Tenant Board, and Community Legal Services. However, these bodies did not come up much when speaking to residents on very low incomes, indicating that these services are inaccessible, or irrelevant to those most marginalised.

Conclusion

Through amplifying the voices of marginalised residents, our research has sought to render visible forms of displacement and the loss of affordable housing that are rarely featured in mainstream planning and policy debates. This is important because the rationale for many LRT projects (including Waterloo's) is the development of dense new communities along the route (Doucet, 2021; Olesen, 2020; Hess, 2020; Baker and Lee, 2019). Replacing 15 units of housing with 138 is, by most metrics, a good thing. However, when we start to question who lived in those 15 units, who lives in the new ones, and what kinds of housing options remain for those who were displaced, the issue of who benefits from this intensification becomes much more complex. Too often, however, these questions are not asked in mainstream planning and policymaking, which is instead primarily focused on the number of new units with little consideration for who those units are for and what they replace. Therefore, one of the key aims of our research is to debunk the commonly-held myth that the current wave of development taking place along Waterloo's new LRT corridor

is being built on what was previously vacant, or empty land and therefore occurred without displacement.

Relying primarily on census data, the Region of Waterloo's own monitoring report concludes that gentrification is taking place *without* significant displacement. The report states that: 'Rising incomes within the CTC suggest an influx of more affluent people but does not conclude that less affluent people are being pushed out of the CTC (Central Transit Corridor) […] an increase in average rents may be due to new units coming onto the market without necessarily significantly changing the rents of existing units' (Region of Waterloo, 2019, p. 40). Our research has produced a counter-narrative that identifies what kinds of housing have been lost (and not replaced) and what this means for how low-income residents experience the boom in development and gentrification along the LRT corridor. This includes not only spatial forms of displacement such as renovictions and demovictions, but also a range of experiential forms of displacement that include harassment from landlords and the lack of bylaw enforcement. This produces feelings of powerlessness and a sense that the new city emerging is not for them, thereby expanding our understanding of non-spatial forms of displacement that primarily focus on loss (Valli, 2015; Shaw and Hagemans, 2015; Kern, 2016).

One of our key messages from this research is that affordable housing strategies must be guided and led by the people they are meant to help. There are many reasons for this, not least of which being the knowledge these individuals have about changes and challenges within their communities. Assembling this knowledge is important for several reasons; it can help move beyond anecdotes to see broader patterns and trends that are harder for policymakers to ignore or dismiss. This is important because, as we have shown, the loss of affordable housing occurs in small drips—a few rooming houses knocked down here, a small apartment 'upgraded' there. But aggregated across the entire LRT corridor—and increasingly beyond (McDougall et al., 2022)—the scale of loss becomes much larger. This is especially important because virtually none of the new dwellings constructed along the LRT corridor are accessible to those with low- or very-low incomes (Doucet, 2021). While each individual we spoke with may not have a complete picture of the changing housing landscape, they each contributed a vital piece to this puzzle.

Our partnership has sought to validate this knowledge with the intention of centring it within planning debates and policy formation. This information must be treated in the same way as other sources of data and knowledge from more privileged people and communities. We have had some degree of success in shifting conversations. In 2020, the City of Kitchener published its affordable housing strategy *Housing for All: a blueprint for a more caring community.* The need to incorporate lived experiences of marginalised communities features prominently in this strategy, and several members of our collaboration team were part of the advisory committee for this report. We take some credit in shifting important local conversations about affordable housing including the need to protect existing supply and the opportunities to use publicly-owned land for the construction of new affordable housing. Where possible, we speak publicly about these issues, or contribute to local media debates. While Kitchener's report reads well, we also recognise that we must continue our efforts to render visible many

hidden aspects of housing that are neither part of mainstream planning debates, nor can easily be analysed through statistics and quantifiable data. The challenge is now shifting from encouraging words to tangible policy changes.

Speaking to those with lived experiences of displacement reveals no shortage of planning and policy ideas. These include: stronger rent control rules to discourage renovictions, better enforcement of property standards and regulations designed to protect tenants, ensuring tenants' rights are protected if a property is renovated, including enforcing the right to return, using publicly-owned land to build new, non-market affordable housing, especially in core urban areas and ensuring adequate provision of safe, secure and welcoming spaces, particularly in downtown areas.

Some of the ideas our respondents talked about are put into practice in other parts of the country. New Westminster, British Columbia passed an anti-renoviction bylaw in 2019 that sets fines of up to $1,000/day for landlords who evict tenants without notice, or do not relocate them to other units (Hennig, 2019). The bylaw also establishes that existing tenants have the right of first refusal after a property has been renovated. Prior to the bylaw, the city estimated that residents of around 300 units were evicted to make way for renovations, and subsequent increases in rent. The mayor, Jonathan Coté, spoke out about the need for such a law by stating that 'renovictions contribute to housing insecurity in our community and with this decision we will continue to move forward with our efforts to protect tenants from the impacts and risks of renovictions' (Boynton, 2020). Since this bylaw was passed, New Westminster has seen zero renovictions, thereby ensuring tenants have the right to stay put, while also protecting an existing supply of affordable housing (Scarborough Mirror, 2022).

Since 2016, the City of Montreal has had the right of first refusal to purchase any property that comes up for sale on the open market. This helps the city add affordable housing supply (without constructing new units) and prevents properties from being purchased by Real Estate Investment Trusts. In 2019, the city identified 300 properties that it was interested in acquiring for the purposes of adding more social housing stock. If a private buyer makes an offer on a property, the city has 60 days to match that offer (Olson, 2020). This policy is part of the city's plan to add 12,000 more units of affordable housing stock. Another part of this plan involves regulation about new developments. In April, 2021, a new bylaw came into effect which stipulates that in developments of more than 450 square metres (around five units), 20% must be social housing, 20% must be affordable housing and 20% must be family-sized units (City of Montreal, 2020).

We highlight these policies because they resonate with solutions that our respondents identified and they speak directly to the housing challenges we have outlined in our research. Learning from other places is essential in these times of housing crisis. Our work continues and the map will be expanded as our resources permit. In Waterloo, we have shifted our attention to addressing a growing homeless emergency. Several major encampments have been established within the community and the Region of Waterloo has been actively seeking to remove encampments via the courts. Using a similar approach to this research, we will work closely with encampment residents to listen to, and amplify their solutions to the housing crisis.

Together with the Social Planning Network of Ontario (SPNO), we have also received funding to conduct similar research in four different communities across the province: York Region, Kingston, Cornwall and Oxford. This will combine oral histories and displacement mapping in both urban and rural communities.

While this kind of information is vital for local governments, they are often in very weak positions to gather this data themselves. In the case of the Region of Waterloo, the spectre of legal action against encampment residents does not put their employees in a strong position to respectfully engage with these communities (see Brown, 2022). Therefore, partnerships between academics and non-profits will remain important. The Social Development Centre recently created a lived experience working group that will play a central role in this kind of research moving forward.

Our partnership has been inspired by the work of the Anti-Eviction Mapping Project (see Maharawal and McElroy, 2018), as well as other collaborative endeavours between scholars and advocates (Rankin and McLean, 2015; Perry et al., 2015). In turn, we hope that our own work can serve as a template for how meaningful collaboration inside and outside of academia can shift conversations, amplify voices and inject new ideas into planning and policy debates. Our work is ongoing, as we have only scratched the surface in examining the full scale of the erosion of affordable housing within our community. However, what we have learned thus far already points to important pathways for more socially just and equitable cities that are built around centring the experiences and knowledge of residents within planning and policymaking.

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