

# Not for Sale!

Housing Education at the Intersection of  
Activism, Architecture, and Advocacy

2024 AIA/ACSA Housing Design Education Award

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# Abstract

Not for Sale! is an innovative studies abroad course on contemporary housing that takes place at the 2023 Venice Biennale of Architecture. The course teaches students about the complex interrelationships between design, public policy, finance, and political action while allowing them to directly participate in an activist campaign against commodified housing.

The course invites students to collaborate with participants in this ongoing housing campaign. Altogether, students work with ten activist organizations, ten architecture practices, and ten advocates. This diverse group includes experts on housing commodification's disproportionate impact on the working class, women, and racialized people. Almost one-third of campaign participants are Indigenous activists, architects, and advocates who are at the forefront of examining the relationship between colonization and housing.

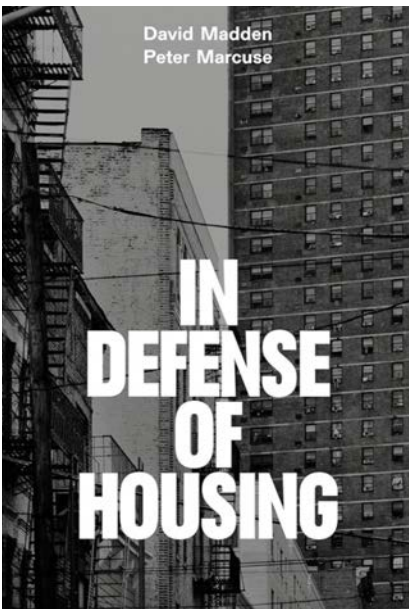
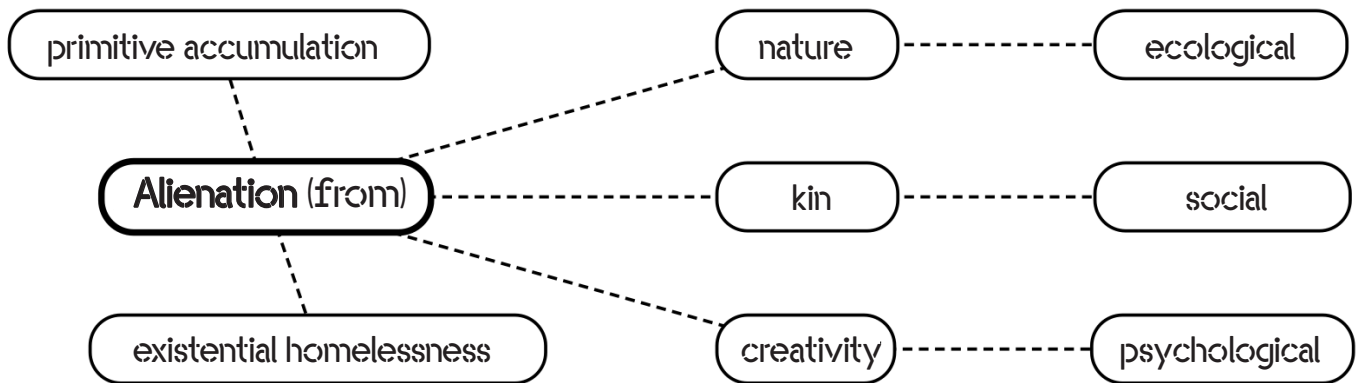
Thirty students are subdivided into teams who collaborate with a subset of activists, architects, and advocates to determine campaign tasks in a bottom-up fashion. Student work has included such things as researching new collective ownership models, designing a prototype for off-grid housing for Indigenous women and girls, developing a social media campaign around a gentrification tax, and case studies of intentional communities for unhoused people.

Two separate universities jointly offered this for-credit course to both undergraduate and graduate students. Both universities have provided generous financial support to ensure equitable access. The course, which runs for five months, takes place inside an open-to-the-public pavilion on the grounds of the Venice Biennale in Venice, Italy – an historic first. This setting affords students the opportunity to make connections with the larger body of work at the Biennale while engaging visitors as an immediate experience in architectural activism.

Architectural activism is a vital frontier in architectural 'practice.' Through collaboration, discussion, research, drawing, modelling, and action, this course equips students with the means to create housing that is socially, ecologically, and creatively empowering for all.

# Ideological Context – Against Housing Alienation

The course introduces students to the concept of housing alienation. Contemporary housing in North America is characterized by unaffordability, disrepair, under-housing, precarity, and homelessness. This is housing alienation—the condition of being separated from our fundamental connections to home. It separates us from the land we inhabit, the social world that supports us, and our full creative lives. We believe the current housing system must be abolished!



We are informed Madden and Marcuse's writing on 'residential alienation.'

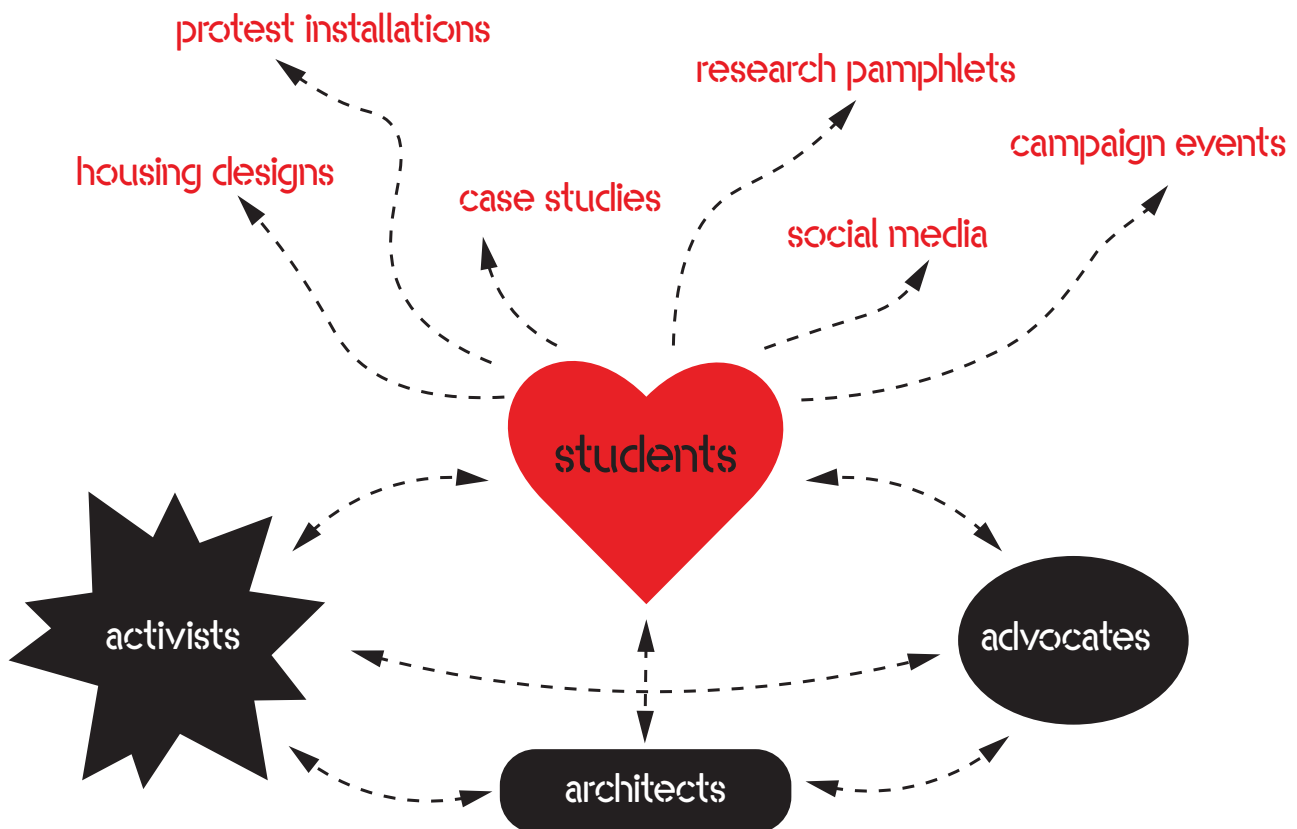
# Pedagogical Structure – Learning Within a Campaign

Throughout the course students are active participants within the Not for Sale! campaign – working to further ten demands that form the core of the campaign. This occurs through periodic in-person and regular virtual meetings with housing activists, architects, and advocates with deep experience in housing issues. Students contribute to the overall campaign through varied work ranging from research reports, to events, to design drawings, and to popular media. This pedagogical structure affords students a unique opportunity to learn and grow on multiple fronts. It increases their knowledge about the design of housing and its relationship to critical challenges around issues of affordability, spatial justice, and human well-being. It provides invaluable first-hand experience in how architectural thinking and tactics can play a role in an expanded definition of architectural practice – that of the architectural activist.

## The Campaign's Ten Demands

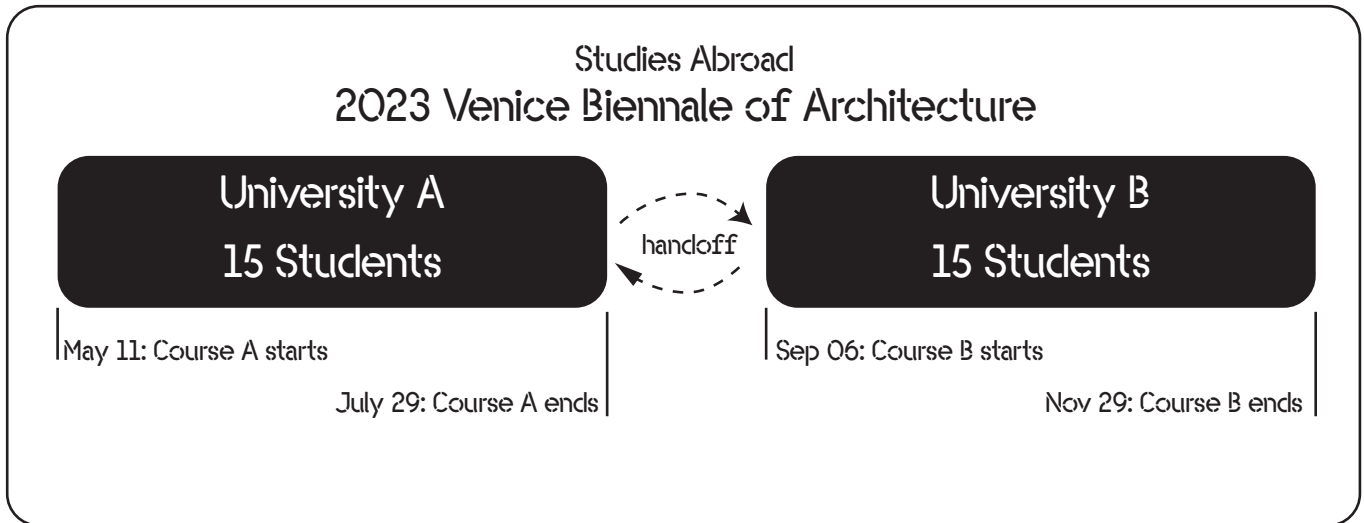
1. Land Back!
2. On the Land Housing!
3. First Nations Home Building Lodges!
4. Reparative Architecture!
5. A Gentrification Tax!
6. Surplus Properties for Housing!
7. Intentional Communities for Unhoused People!
8. Collective Ownership!
9. Mutual Aid Housing!
10. Ambient Ecosystem Commons!

## The Collaborative Field



# Venice Biennale: Laboratory of the Future

This year's Biennale, curated by Lesley Lokko and titled Laboratory of the Future, is in many ways unprecedented. Never before has the Biennale included predominantly small and young practices. It is the first to foreground the African diaspora. It is a highly political Biennale overtly challenging dominant power structures in the quest for a better world. We feel this is precisely the location to situate students learning how to create more empowering housing for all. Students from University A, accompanied by a professor from that university, were in Venice for roughly the first half of the Biennale and students from University B, are in Venice for roughly the second half of the Biennale, again accompanied by a professor from their respective university.



Lesley Lokko, curator



# Student Work

The following pages include examples of student work completed in the course to-date. The selected work included in this award submission is associated with five of the ten campaign demands. For each demand, students worked in teams of three, and in collaboration with the activists, architects, and advocates working on that specific demand. Students met with these activists, architects, and advocates in-person in Venice as well as plentiful meetings via Zoom. The work of University B is ongoing.

The following applies to all student work samples on subsequent pages.

**Project Title:** Each student work sub-section is titled at the upper left

**Month/Year Completed:** July, 2023

**Role of Nominee:** Course Instructor & Campaign Organizer

**Collaborators & Funding Source Expenses:** This course plays a vital roll within the context of an architectural activist campaign and associated exhibition at the 2023 Venice Biennale of Architecture. The overall effort involves more than 100 individuals, including activists, architects, and advocates (excluding students). Every participant has been financially compensated. Excluding direct funding to students, as described below, the total project costs are approximately \$450,000 USD. This funding has been provided by a major federal government arts agency, and two separate regional architectural advocacy organizations.

**Student Compensation:**

- All students receive 8-credits for enrolment in the study abroad course.
- University A and University B have jointly provided direct funds to students in the total of \$108,000 USD. This translates to an average of \$3,600/student which covers airfare and substantially offsets living expenses for each student's three month stay in Venice.



Students at work in the Venice pavilion.

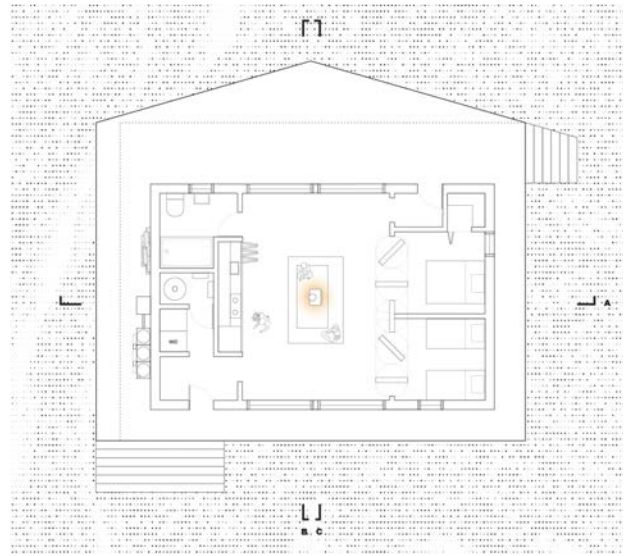
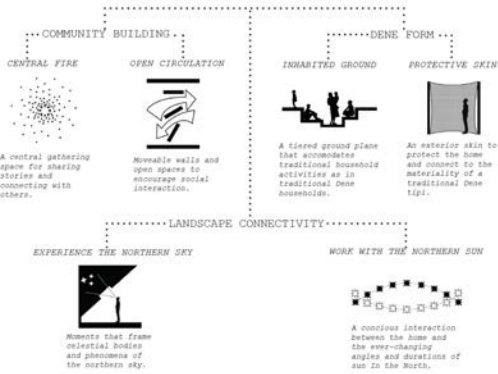


# On the Land Housing!

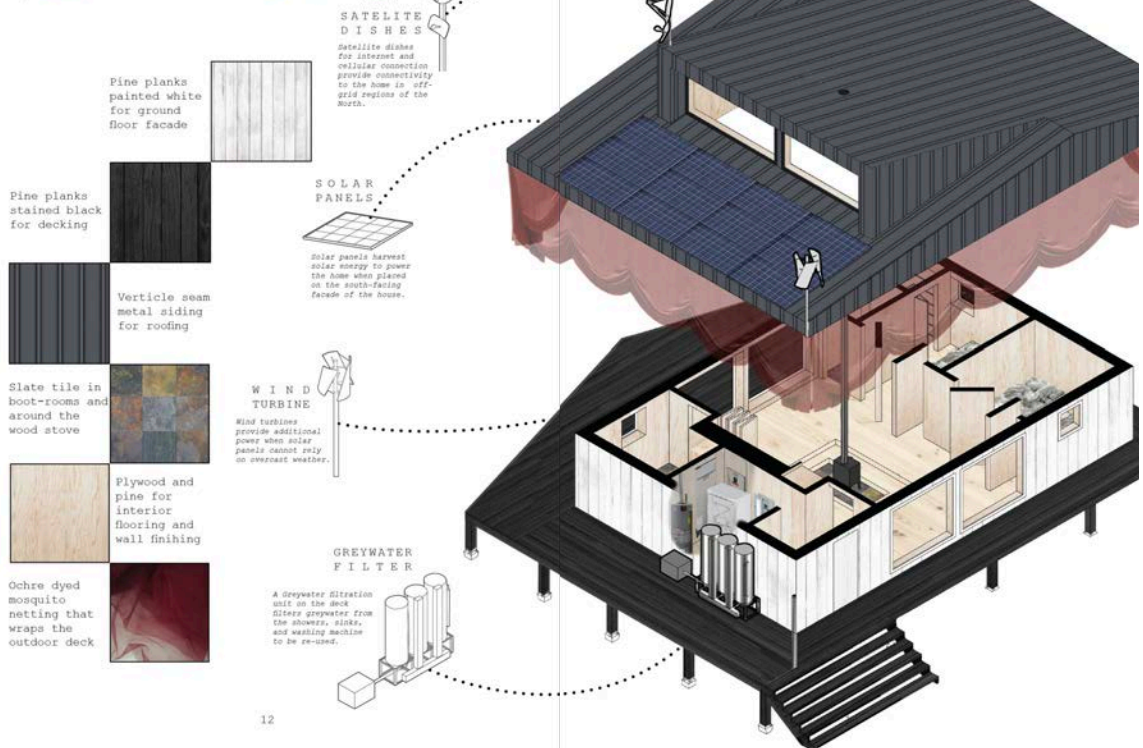
(selected examples of student work from the summer studio)

Northern Indigenous people demand that housing funding be given directly to Indigenous led organizations to provide women-focused-on-the-land camps so that young Indigenous women can access a sense of home in a safe community environment. Students worked with an Indigenous activist and architect to explore a possible prototype design. These are samples from design work on an individual dwelling prototype as well as potential on-the-land community configurations.

## DESIGN PRINCIPLES FOR ON-THE-LAND HOUSING

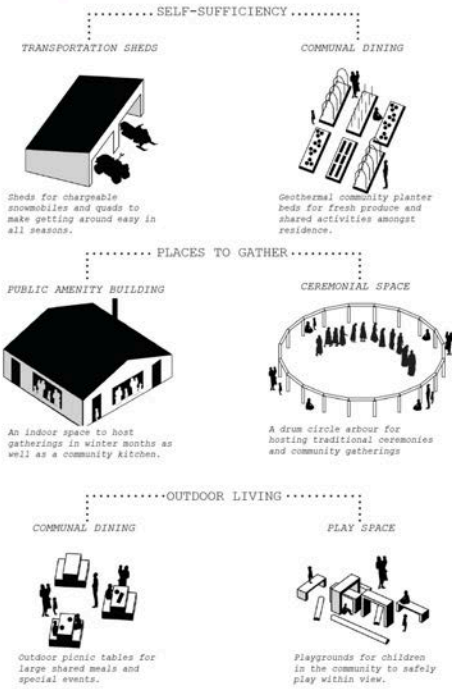


## TECH AND MATERIALS



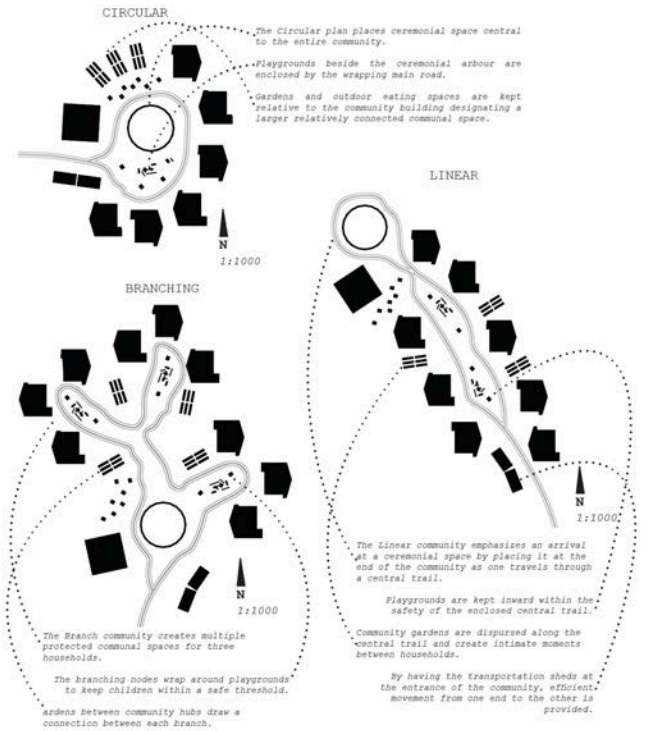


# DESIGN PRINCIPLES FOR OFF-GRID COMMUNITIES

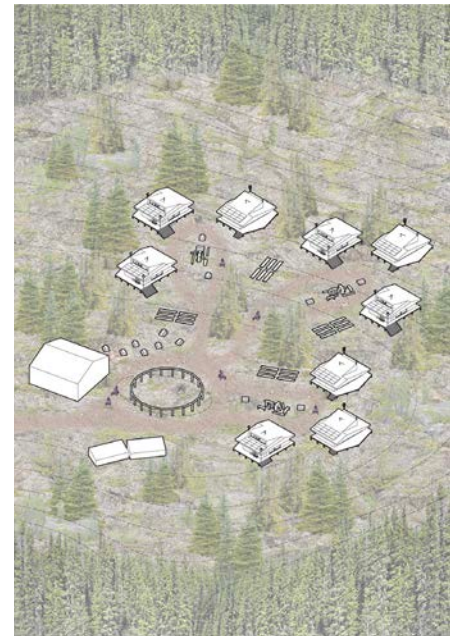
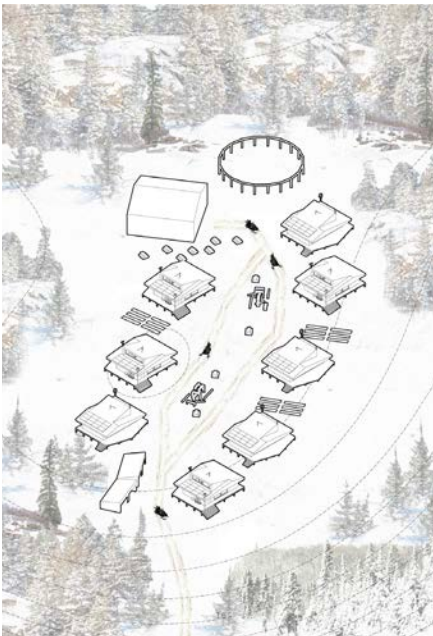


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# COMMUNITY LAYOUT PROPOSALS



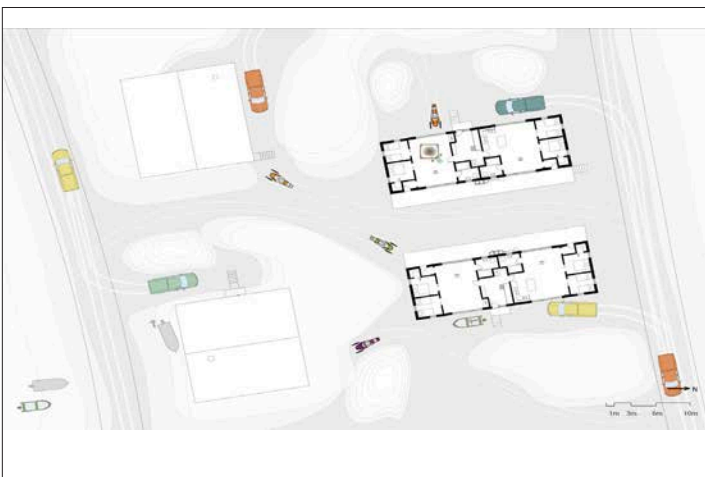
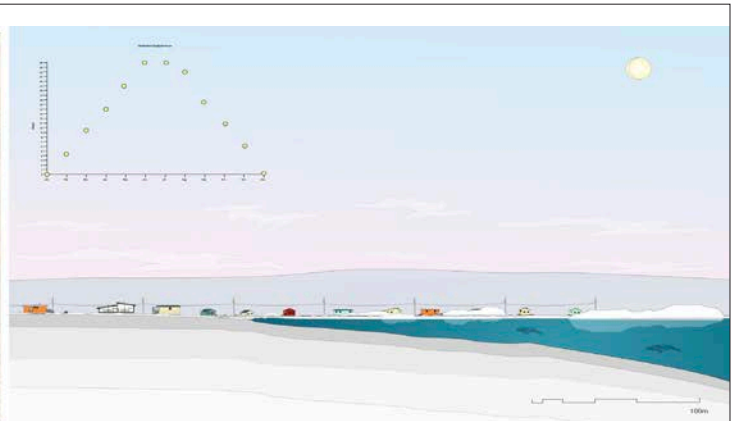
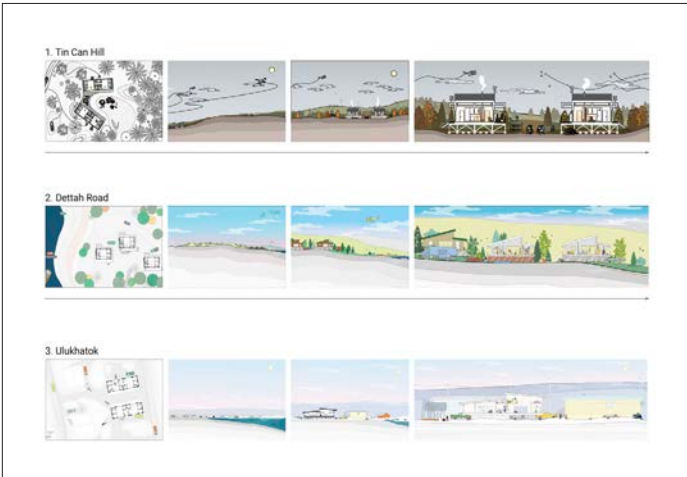
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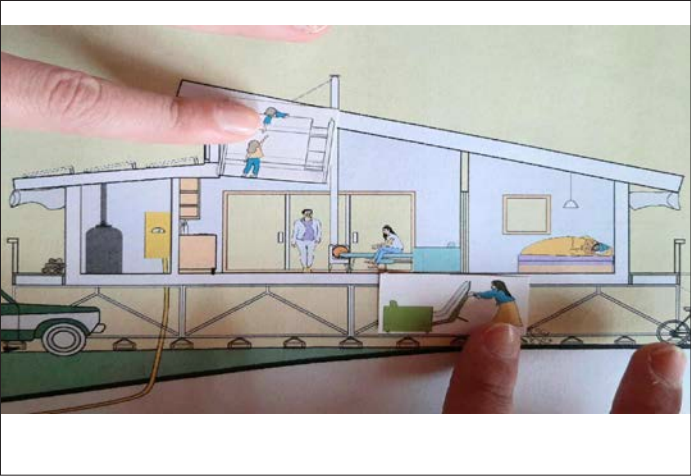
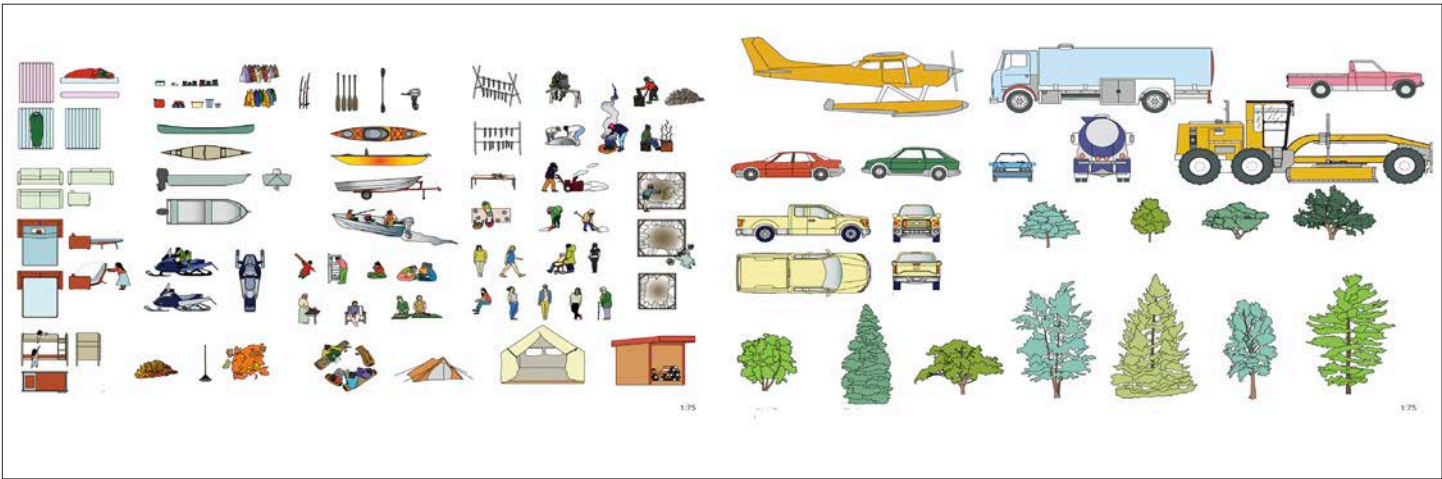
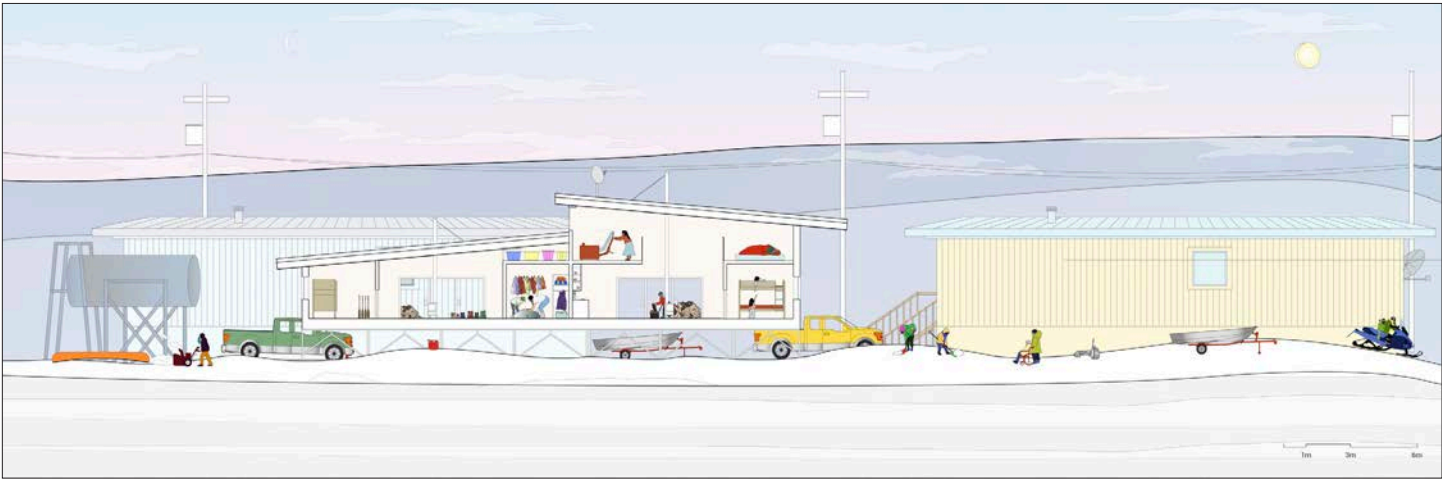


# On the Land Housing!

(selected examples of student work from the fall studio)

Northern Indigenous people demand that housing funding be given directly to Indigenous led organizations to provide Indigenous women, girls and LGBTQ2SIA+ persons a secure and nurturing sense of home. Students worked with a Dene architect to develop a toolkit to work with communities members to design, site and inhabit an on the land community.

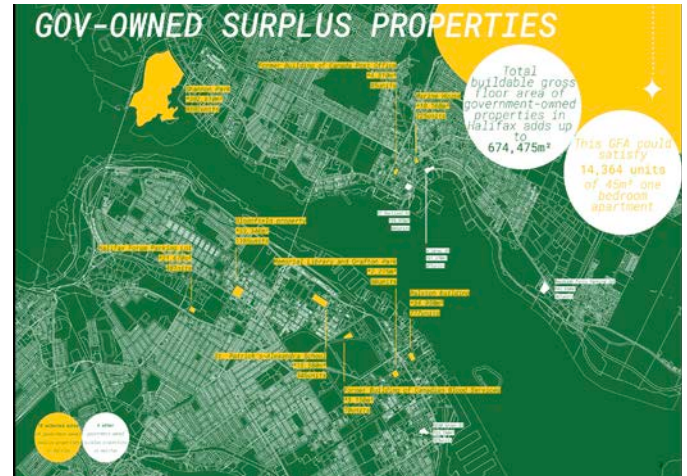
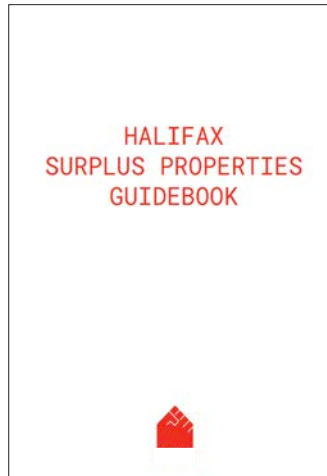




# Surplus Properties for Housing!

(selected examples of student work from the summer studio)

To help achieve the demand that all levels of government make available surplus public properties assets available for the development of affordable housing, students have created an inventory of surplus properties in a case study location of Halifax, Nova Scotia. To further demonstrate the viability of this demand, they have selected one specific school and designed a phased transformation into affordable housing.

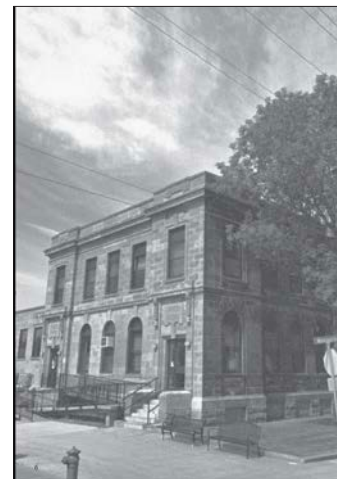


**The Memorial Library and Grafton Park**

**context** timeline  
 1886 Derived as the pastor's grounds for 100 years from both Grafton Park from cemetery  
 1901 The Memorial Library opened  
 2014 The Memorial Library closed and the new Halifax Central Library opened

**building and lot size**  
 floor space 4,729 m<sup>2</sup>  
 lot area 5,368 m<sup>2</sup>

**location and function**  
 address 5161 Spring Garden Rd  
 function(s) cemetery, library, park



**Former Building of Dartmouth Post Office**

**context** timeline  
 1914-1917 Built vacant  
 1926 Store built on the site's what is used to be the postal service moved to a smaller building  
 Registered as a municipal heritage property  
 2001 Sold to a hardware company owned by Jim Lanley

**building and lot size**  
 floor space 11,300 m<sup>2</sup>  
 lot area 2,756 m<sup>2</sup>

**location and function**  
 address 30 Queen Street  
 function(s) post office



**Bloomfield Properties**

**context** timeline  
 1916-1917 Built  
 1962 School and community center  
 2007 Master Plan Design by Eugene Bloomfield  
 2010 Sold by Halifax Regional Municipality (HRM) to Housing Nova Scotia  
 2016 Eugene Bloomfield cut ties with Housing Nova Scotia  
 2021 Sold to local developer Park Investments

**building and lot size**  
 floor space 9,200 m<sup>2</sup>  
 lot area 12,522 m<sup>2</sup>

**location and function**  
 address 2786 Agricola St  
 function(s) public school, community centre



**St. Patrick's Alexandra School**

**context** timeline  
 1907 Built  
 1921 Renovated, demolished the old's school and widened the main entrance to Mainland St  
 2011 Vacant  
 Closed as a school and declared surplus by the Municipality  
 2020 Sold to JNO Developments

**building and lot size**  
 floor space 12,000 m<sup>2</sup>  
 lot area 18,000 m<sup>2</sup>

**location and function**  
 address 2077 Mainland St  
 function(s) junior high school

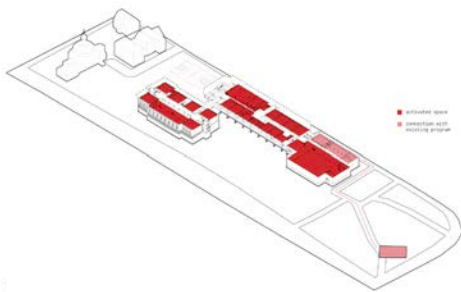
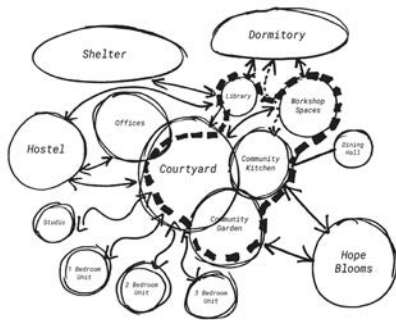
# THE FUTURE OF ST. PATRICK'S ALEXANDRA SCHOOL IS UNCERTAIN.

located in Halifax, Nova Scotia and vacant for over a decade. This site has been passed through the hands of the government over to private developers and now it's at a standstill.

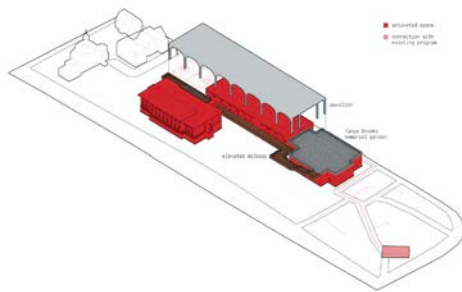
In response to the critical need for housing in Halifax, this design proposal is intended as a social housing project for people who are formerly homeless, at risk of homelessness or housing insecurity.



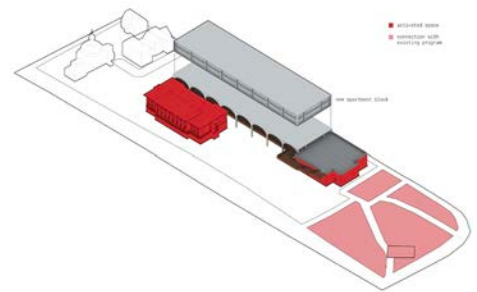
PROGRAM RELATIONSHIP DIAGRAM



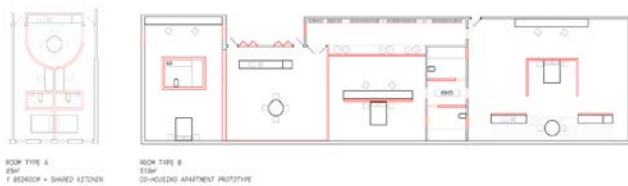
IMMEDIATE ACTION 1MONTH-3YEARS



INTERMEDIATE 3YEARS-8YEARS



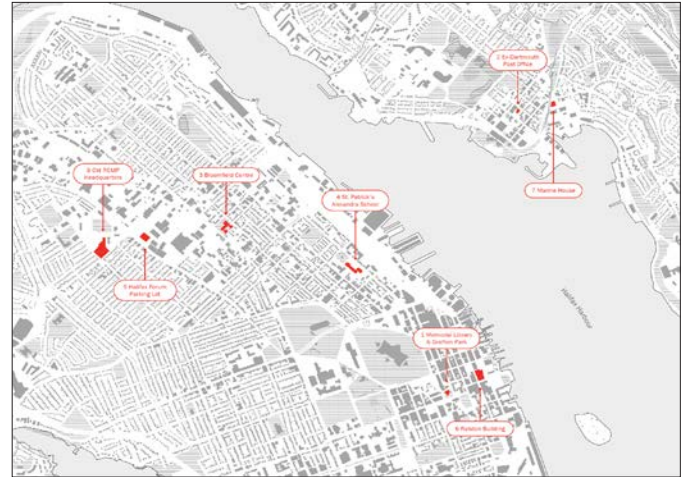
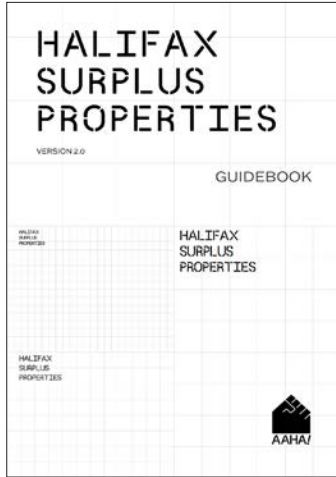
LONG-TERM HOUSING 8YEARS+



# Surplus Properties for Housing!

(selected examples of student work from the fall studio)

To help achieve the demand that all levels of government make available surplus public properties assets available for the development of affordable housing, students expanded and developed the guidebook, designed 8 posters to be posted on surplus sites in Halifax and initiated a competition for these surplus sites.



**1** 00076943 5385 Spring Garden Rd

## Memorial Library & Grafton Park

TRV / MAY \$0.7 \$5,348,000  
Zoning: MGP  
Land Use: Educational  
Ownership: Municipal

This site has an integral connection to the history of the City of Halifax. During its foundation, the site lay outside the walls of the town and was largely open for activities for people who were not included in the services. In the context of Poor Workshops and Poorhouses, the Memorial Library site served as a parking area for the many destitute people in the Victorian era. These people were often buried in coffins they made themselves.

With the help of a grant negotiated by the province, the site was turned into Grafton Park. The grant defined the property as a public space and became a permanent lease to the City of Halifax. This land use was seen as an avenue of respect for the dead who lay buried under the park and the street, a fact which justifies the subsequent contribution of the site Memorial Library in which many graves were discovered. As of 2006, the library has closed, and the building remains vacant. There is an ongoing joint development plan between the Halifax Regional Municipality and Dalhousie University, the details of which are under discussion.

Timeline: 1800 (Royal's grant for 200 years), 1882 (Built from a cemetery by Stephen Fox), 1950 (Memorial Library opened), 2024 (2024/25: The Memorial Library closes and the Halifax Central Library opening)

Legend: included, excluded, high-rise, medium-rise, low-rise, multi-unit residential, residential-commercial, commercial, green space.

**existing**  
In its current state, the Memorial Library is a 2-story building with direct access to Grafton Park.

**zoning**  
This location is in accordance to the HRM Regional Centre Land Use By-Law. Height limit of this zoning is 15m tall, no FAR restrictions applicable.

**contextual approach**  
The area surrounding the library is full of mixed-use buildings which benefit from the central location. The area wishes to incorporate walking routes that harbors a variety of housing and green spaces in between, keeping this in mind, our suggestion maintains a contextual height to match the neighbouring 5-story building, while maintaining an open park area to connect the building to its surroundings.

Proposed: +80 units, FAR 0.24, +20 units. New: +127 units, FAR 0.36, +45 units.

**2** 00108043 35 Northworth St

## Dartmouth Post Office

(Former)

TRV / MAY \$228,300  
Zoning: OD  
Land Use: Post Office  
Ownership: Private

The Old Dartmouth Post Office is a 100-year-old limestone, sandstone brick building built in the Edwardian Era. It was also the site of Dartmouth's first electric clock tower before it was torn down due to safety concerns. Within the building, there is an abandoned courtyard that has caused many Dartmouth visitors during the First World War. With these heritage elements, the Old Dartmouth Post Office has been considered a Municipal Heritage Property since 2010.

In 2021, Canada Post sold this building to a private owner for \$3.8 million dollars. Since then, a 20-story mixed-use tower was proposed on the site that will keep the historical facade intact.

Timeline: 2024 (2024/25: Renovation to meet existing zoning requirements of postal services, building height will be regulated as a Municipal Heritage Property), 2023 (Building closed, empty for 81.66 years), 2022 (Proposed 20-story, mixed-use tower).

Legend: included, excluded, high-rise, medium-rise, low-rise, multi-unit residential, residential-commercial, commercial, green space.

**existing**  
The Dartmouth Post Office is a low-rise building that steps down one story for the result, it also supports a modest amount of green space on the street-facing facade.

**zoning**  
This location is in accordance to the HRM Regional Centre Land Use By-Law. FAR limit of 0.17, it is lower than the current height limit zoning of 90m, setting at 10m.

**contextual approach**  
The former Dartmouth Post Office is surrounded by a variety of different housing typologies as well as connections for a few commercial amenities. It also enjoys the convenience of being a short walking distance to the generous park-space of the Dartmouth Commons. As a result, the site is very adaptable and should be maximized.

Proposed: +30 units, FAR 0.17, +15 units. New: +103 units, FAR 0.37, +53 units.

# SURPLUS PROPERTIES FOR HOUSING!

Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada

PROJECT REQUIREMENTS

## COMPETITION CRITERIA

**EFFECTIVENESS**

Who are the target demographics?  
Is there a mix of affordability?  
How is this reflected in the unit types, sizes, and floorplate configurations?

**COMMUNITY**

What amenities and services are lacking in the context and can they be integrated?  
Conceptual rigor – what message do you intend to convey to the public through your proposal?

**DESIGN**

How far should density be pushed in relation to the existing context?  
How can the design be accommodating and accessible for all?

# THIS SHOULD BE HOUSING!

**1921** SCHOOL BUILT

**1971** SCHOOL RENOVATED

**2011** SCHOOL CLOSED

**2020** SOLD TO JONO DEVELOPMENTS TO DEMOLISH

**2023** THIS SITE HAS BEEN VACANT FOR 12 YEARS!

JOIN THE CAMPAIGN!

376 PEOPLE COULD LIVE HERE

1856 PEOPLE COULD LIVE HERE

ST. PATRICK'S ALEXANDRA SCHOOL

WE DEMAND SURPLUS PROPERTIES FOR AFFORDABLE HOUSING!

# THIS SHOULD BE HOUSING!

**1971** BLOOMFIELD CENTER BUILT

**1982** COMMUNITY CENTER AND SCHOOL

**2007** IMAGINE BLOOMFIELD MASTERPLAN

**2014** CENTER CLOSED

**2021** SOLD TO BANC INVESTMENTS TO DEMOLISH

**2023** THIS SITE HAS BEEN VACANT FOR 9 YEARS!

JOIN THE CAMPAIGN!

1396 PEOPLE COULD LIVE HERE

237 PEOPLE COULD LIVE HERE

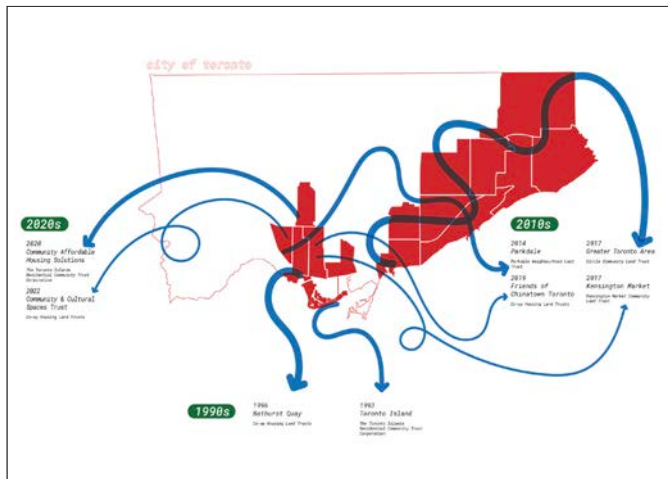
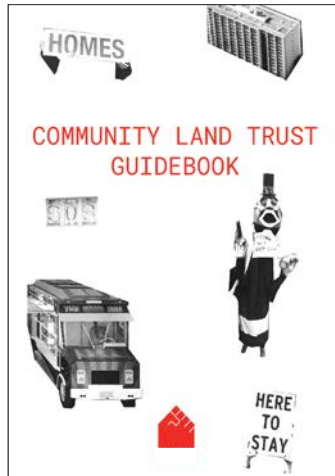
BLOOMFIELD CENTRE

WE DEMAND SURPLUS PROPERTIES FOR AFFORDABLE HOUSING!

# A Gentrification Tax!

(selected examples of student work from the summer studio)

Students in the summer studio worked with an existing community land trust, an architecture practice with deep experience in affordable housing, and an advocacy group specializing in innovative tax strategies, to amplify the campaign's demand for gentrification taxes that would be earmarked to affordable housing within community land trusts. Among other things, students researched and documented the structure of various community land trusts and created a highly inventive social media campaign.



The top part is a black and white photograph of a community protest. People are holding signs that say '99 YEARS', 'COMMUNITY OWNED LAND', 'HERE TO STAY', 'PRESERVE PROTECT', and 'PARKDALE'. The bottom part is an information page for 'Parkdale Neighbourhood Land Trust'. It includes a map, a 'connections' diagram, a 'membership' list, and 'information' such as 'established: 2014', 'neighbourhood: Parkdale', and 'model: community ownership'.

The top part is a black and white photograph of a community protest. People are holding signs that say '563', 'HOMES', and 'PERMANENTLY AFFORDABLE'. The bottom part is an information page for 'Circle Community Land Trust'. It includes a map, a 'connections' diagram, a 'membership' list, and 'information' such as 'established: 2017', 'neighbourhood: Greater Toronto Area', and 'model: shared equity'.

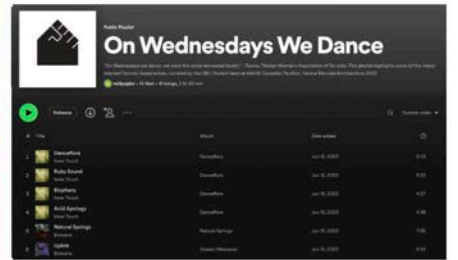
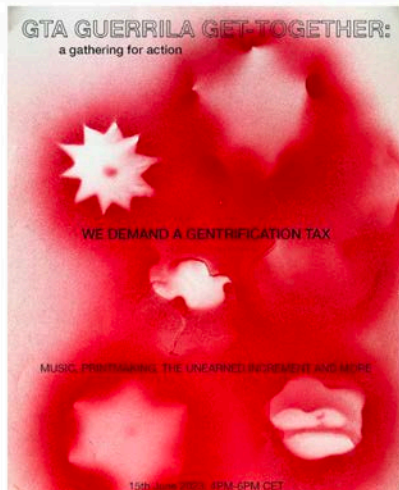
The top part is a black and white photograph of a community protest. People are holding a large yellow banner that says 'COMMUNITY OWNED KENSINGTON'. The bottom part is an information page for 'Kensington Market Community Land Trust'. It includes a map, a 'connections' diagram, a 'membership' list, and 'information' such as 'established: 2017', 'neighbourhood: Kensington Market', and 'model: land acquisition'.





Social Media & Architectural Activism!

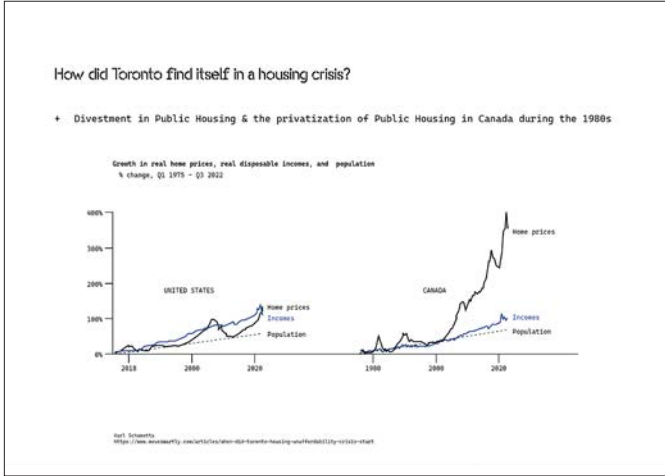
- Instagram
- TikTok
- YouTube



# A Gentrification Tax!

(selected examples of student work from the fall studio)

Students worked with an existing community land trust, an architecture practice with deep experience in affordable housing, and an advocacy group specializing in innovative tax strategies, to amplify the campaign's demand for gentrification taxes that would be earmarked to affordable housing within community land trusts. They assembled an advocacy slide deck that used publicly available data to calculate how much tax would have been raised by the proposed tax in 2022 and how much housing could be built with it.



### Oxford Dictionary definition of "Gentrification"

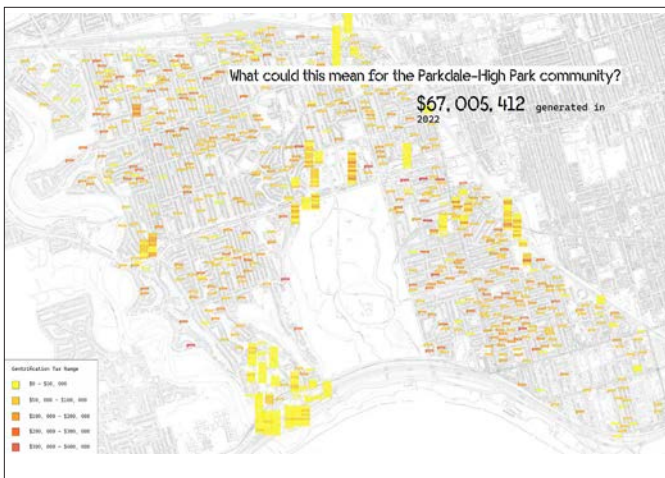
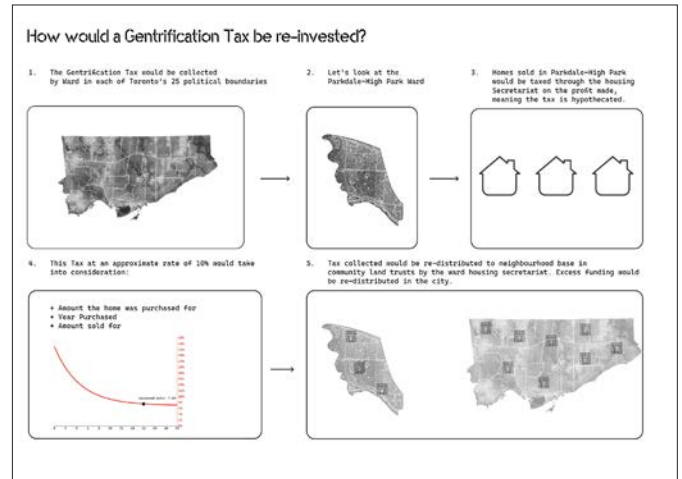
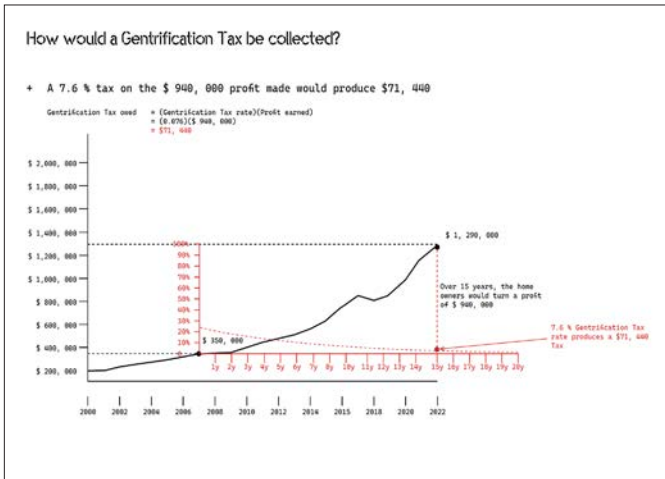
Gentrification  
 /dʒentrɪfɪˈkeɪʃn/  
 noun  
 noun: gentrification; plural noun: gentrifications

Improving housing for who? This process cannot continue to be normalized in a neighborhood.

the process whereby the character of a poor urban area is changed by wealthier people moving in, improving housing, and attracting new businesses, often displacing current inhabitants in the process.

the process of making someone or something more refined, polite, or respectable.

a process that displaces lower income residents and for wealthier ones can't be refined, polite or respectable.



What if the Gentrification Tax was applied to the entire City of Toronto in 2022?



The City of Toronto is **638km<sup>2</sup>**

Amount of 1 km bigger  
the city is than PD-HP

↓

39.375

x

\$ 67,005,412

=

**\$2,638,338,970**



Parkdale-High Park is **16km<sup>2</sup>**

Amount generated  
by PD-HP in 2022

Could have been generated  
in the City of Toronto in  
2022!\*

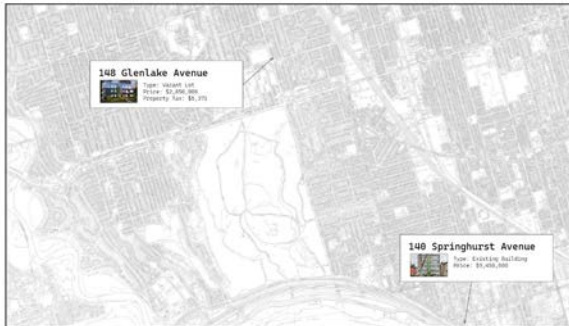
\*Please note: This is an estimate. There are many factors that would affect this number in reality. Reflecting on your political wards, how do you think the value generated in your ward would differ?

How many affordable units could be added to the Toronto with the Gentrification Tax earned in 2022?



City of Toronto RealEstate.com  
Showing 1000000+ Listings

Exploring possible purchase sites in Parkdale-Highpark



How many of these housing combinations could be achieved via the 2022 Parkdale-Highpark Gentrification Tax of \$ 67,005,412?



SCENARIO	BUILD COST MODEL	\$/sq ft	CONSTRUCTION COST	PROPERTY COST	PROJECT COST	UNITS	PEOPLE HOUSED **
A) 148 GlenLake	Mid-rise High End (3) \$5,200	x 68800	= \$3,576,000	\$2,550,000	\$6,126,000	8 NEW UNITS	24 NEW PPL HOUSED
B) 140 Springhurst	Mid-rise High End	\$5,200	x 33500	= \$1,653,750		6 NEW UNITS	11 NEW PPL HOUSED
C) RETROFIT	CHC Retrofits Max.	\$2,287	x 13750	= \$3,150,525	\$9,450,000	21 SECURED UNITS	48 PPL SECURED

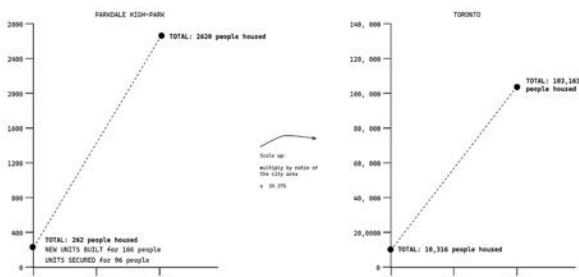
In one year the tax could fund:  
 6 - new 8-unit buildings +  
 2 - existing 21-unit buildings with 4 new units  
 in Parkdale-High Park.

**TOTAL COST = \$47,854,544**  
**REMAINDER = \$463,118**

66 NEW UNITS    144 NEW PPL HOUSED  
 42 SECURED UNITS    96 PPL SECURED

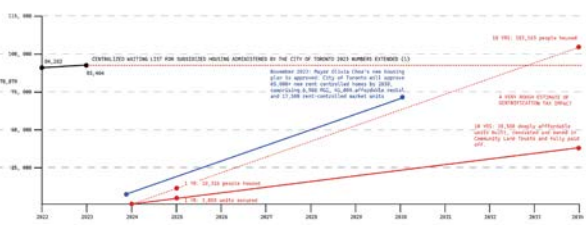
\*\* PEOPLE HOUSED BASED ON CURRENT OCCUPANCY RATES

What could the results of Study A mean for the Parkdale-High Park community over time?



\*Please note: This is an estimate. There are many factors that would affect this number in reality. Reflecting on your political wards, how do you think the number of people housed in your ward would differ?

How would the Gentrification Tax contribute to Toronto's affordable housing needs?



City of Toronto Housing Strategy, Housing Unit Quarterly Report, November 17, 2023  
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