

Little Jamaica Retail Strategy

Community Consultation Summary

PREPARED FOR

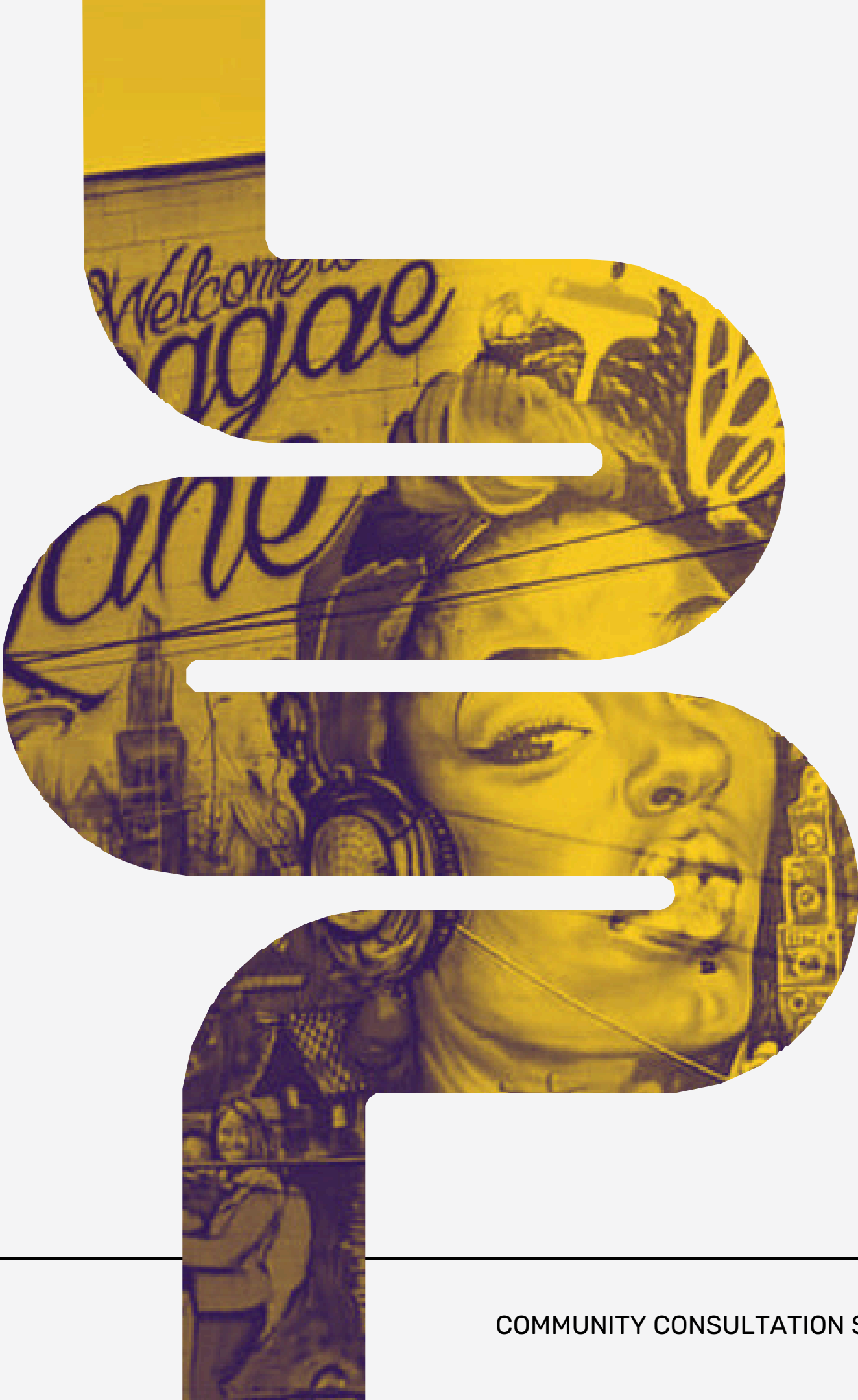
Black Business and Professional Association, BBPA

PREPARED BY

Black Planning Project

Table of Contents

Executive Summary	05
Project Overview	06
Black Businesses in Little Jamaica	08
Consultation Strategy	12
One-on-One Interviews	15
Community Consultation	21
Findings	24
Recommendations	25
Conclusion	28



LAND ACKNOWLEDGMENT

We acknowledge that we are on the traditional territory of many Nations, including the Mississaugas of the Credit, the Anishnabeg, the Chippewa, the Haudenosaunee and the Wendat and is now home to many diverse First Nations, Inuit and Métis peoples.

We also acknowledge that Toronto is covered by Treaty 13 with the Mississaugas of the Credit. We further acknowledge all Treaty peoples, including those who came here as settlers – as migrants either in this generation or in generations past – and those who came here involuntarily, particularly Africans brought here as a result of the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade.

We recognize the historical impact and multi-generational effects of colonization, oppressive laws and broken treaties that have occurred here and are an ongoing dimension of our collective responsibilities. Therefore, this work is done in solidarity with First Nations, Inuit and Métis peoples. We also endeavour to go beyond land acknowledgments to material support and advocacy to forward Indigenous people's interests.



OUR CONSULTING TEAM



SAMEER PATEL
CO-FOUNDER, DIVERCITIES
ADVISORY INC.
VICE PRESIDENT, TATE ECONOMIC
RESEARCH INC.



ABIGAIL MORIAH
URBAN PLANNER
FOUNDER
BLACK PLANNING PROJECT



HANAA ALI
PROJECT MANAGER
BLACK PLANNING PROJECT



AVERY SABETA
PROJECT COORDINATOR
BLACK PLANNING PROJECT



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report provides a summary of the consultations held with Little Jamaica's business community in July 2024. The purpose of the consultation was to inform the Little Jamaica Retail Strategy and provide a deeper understanding of community members' sentiments. The consultations engaged various stakeholders in Little Jamaica including Black businesses, non-profit and community organizations, city officials, and business improvement areas (BIAs).

The main findings from the community consultation were:

1. **Technical assistance:** Business owners expressed the need for more technical assistance, such as workshops on digital marketing, grant writing, etc.
2. **Enhancing the physical surroundings:** Business owners shared that more beautification efforts are needed in the community as well as the development of physical markers specific to Little Jamaica.
3. **Access to information:** Business owners have requested a centralized database for information that pertains to them and contains relevant information for grant applications, BIA activities, and events in community.
4. **Access to capital:** Business owners are interested in gaining better access to capital and grants to scale and improve their businesses.

PROJECT OVERVIEW

The Little Jamaica retail strategy aims to identify actions that can preserve and expand the existing Black businesses in Little Jamaica and attract new Black businesses to the area.

The project aims to:

- Identify gaps in retail sectors and identify methods to attract retail.
- Identify retail and investment opportunities.
- Identify niche markets for independent businesses.
- Understand retail trends.
- Analyse relevant needs assessments and environmental scans from partner agencies.
- Develop a comprehensive Retail Strategy suitable for public review and presentation with measurable goals and a framework to report and evaluate the achievement of those goals.

Central to the retail strategy is a robust consultation component which engaged BBPA, local businesses, partner organizations and local community members. This included:

**ADVISORY COMMITTEE
CONSULTATION**

**BUSINESS ONE-ON-ONE
INTERVIEWS**

**COMMUNITY
CONSULTATION**



WWW.TORONTO-BIA.COM

PROJECT OVERVIEW



ADVISORY COMMITTEE CONSULTATION

The team conducted consultations with BBPA's Advisory Committee which included representatives from the City, planners, technical experts and BBPA leadership.

The team presented the Advisory committee with initial findings and the one-on-one consultation strategy and received feedback on the data that needed to be collected to inform the retail strategy.

The consultation furthered the team's understanding of the opportunities and challenges facing Black businesses.

BUSINESS ONE-ON-ONE INTERVIEWS

The team conducted one-on-one interviews with Black business owners going door to door and having insightful conversations. The owners shared information about their challenges and ideas for improvement. To incentivize business participation, gift cards were purchased from the participating businesses for the purpose of promotion. The gift cards were then offered as compensation during the community consultation. This created a positive feedback loop that supported various local small businesses encouraging business owners to share their perspectives while fostering collaboration among the community overall.

COMMUNITY CONSULTATION

A small group of businesses and BIA staff came together on June 25th for a community consultation. Participants were offered gift cards as an incentive for active participation. The gift cards were sourced from local businesses.

This approach encouraged community involvement as well as direct economic support for local small businesses, promoting a reciprocal relationship-building.

To further collaborate with the local small businesses', space for hosting the consultation was rented from a local business

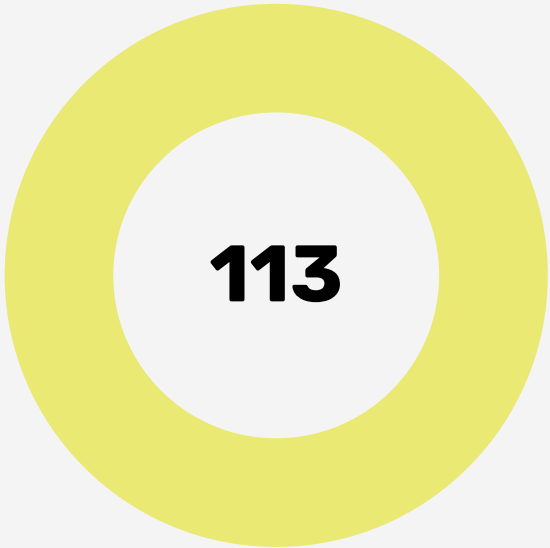
LITTLE JAMAICA BUSINESSES – A SNAPSHOT

The genesis of the Eglinton West district in Toronto also known as “Little Jamaica” can be traced from the late 1950s, when a number of immigrants from the Caribbean, mostly Jamaicans, settled in Eglinton West.

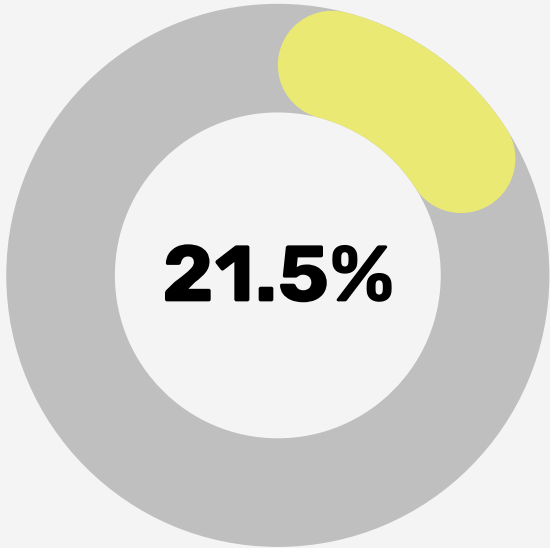
The area has undergone over a decade of LRT construction, changing the face of retail in the neighbourhood. The impact of the LRT on the area has been significant resulting in a marked reduction in Black businesses in the area.

Today there are 113 Black-owned businesses in Little Jamaica, forming approximately 21.5% of all ground floor businesses.

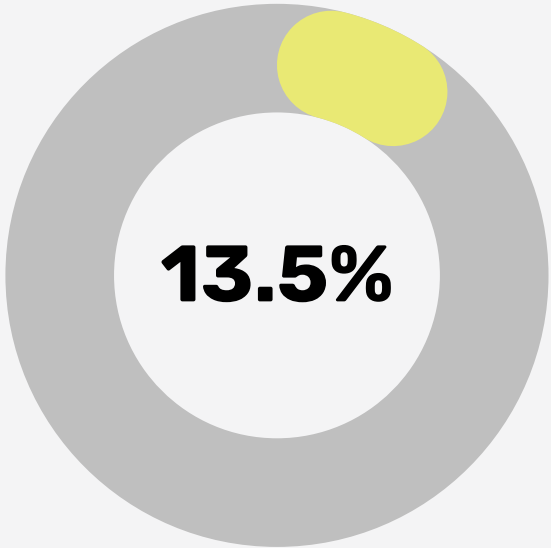
Vacancy rates in Little Jamaica are at 14.5%, almost double the typical vacancy rate for main streets which is usually between 5% and 7.5%.



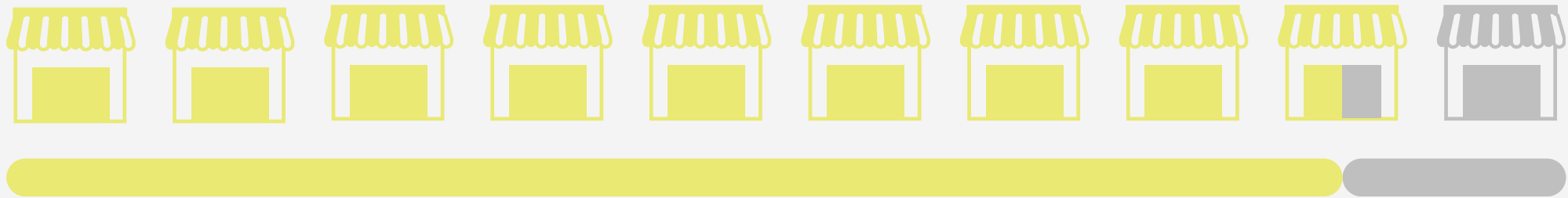
Number of Black Owned Businesses



Ground Floor Businesses are Black Owned



Total Ground Floor Commercial Square Feet of Black Businesses



VACANCY RATE

14.5%

LITTLE JAMAICA BUSINESSES – A SNAPSHOT



The majority of Black businesses in Little Jamaica focus on Personal Care as well as Food & Drink, together they form 62.8% of all businesses. These business types have a long history in the area, Monica’s Hair Salon and Randy’s Takeout are two examples of businesses dating back to the 80s. These two business types continue to attract customers from all over the city seeking Caribbean tastes and Black beauty care services and products.



LITTLE JAMAICA BUSINESSES – HISTORIC OVERVIEW

Little Jamaica has been a site of belonging for members of the Caribbean and African diaspora for over 70 years. With the highest concentration of Black owned businesses in Toronto, it has been a beacon of culture for the Black community. However, with over a decade of construction in the area due to the Metrolinx Light Rail Transit (LRT) and the COVID pandemic over 140 businesses have closed in the area, the majority being Black owned. (Kong, 2023) (Cadastre, 2021)

Jamaican immigrants arrive in Canada following changes in immigration policies



1950 -1980

2001

2011

COVID-19 pandemic begins, LRT is not complete and over 140 businesses have closed along Eglinton West



2020

**BLACK
POPULATION:
5,828
(26% DECLINE)
(CENSUS VISIBLE
MINORITY)**

2021

The LRT is still incomplete (no opening date) and over 110 developments have been proposed along Eglinton West



2024

**BLACK
POPULATION:
7,860
(CENSUS VISIBLE
MINORITY)**

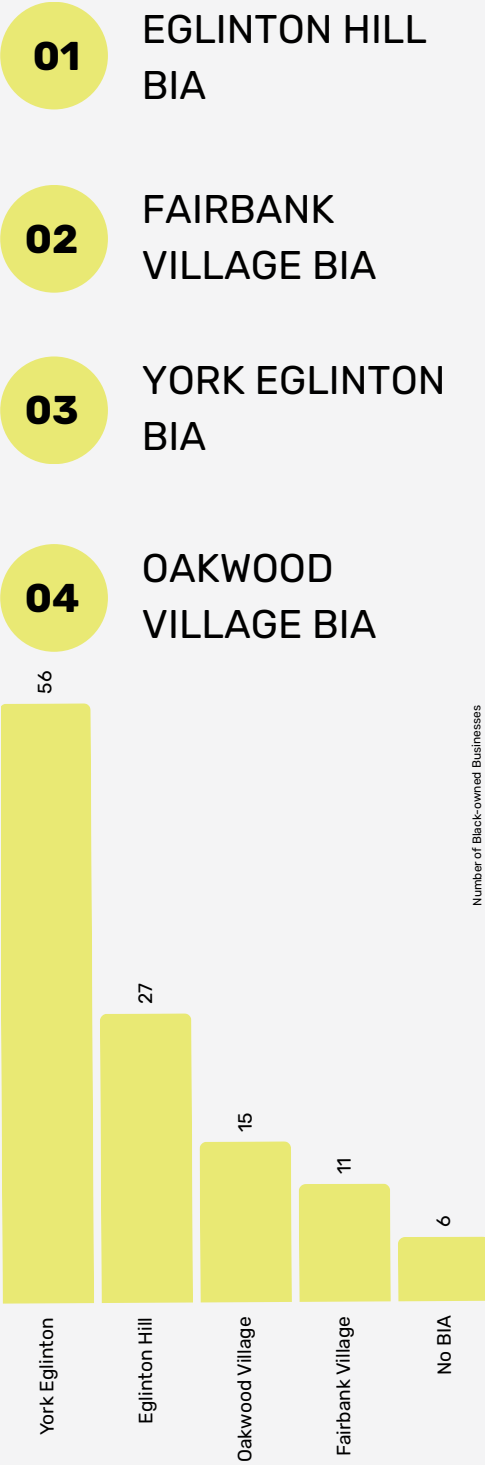


First phase of the Eglinton LRT begins expected opening 2020



BBPA for the community office opens near Oakwood and Eglinton West to support Little Jamaica

LITTLE JAMAICA BUSINESSES – BIAs



The majority of Black businesses are concentrated in York Eglinton BIA 48% (56). The 2nd largest concentration is on the west end of Eglinton Avenue within the Eglinton Hill BIA 23% (27).

CONSULTATION STRATEGY – WHO WE ENGAGED



BLACK BUSINESSES



NON PROFIT AND COMMUNITY
ORGANIZATIONS



GOVERNMENT AND CITY
OFFICIALS



BUSINESS IMPROVEMENT
AREAS

The consultation strategy aimed to engage businesses and stakeholders from all across Little Jamaica. The sampling strategy for the one-on-one interviews was based on a representative sample distributed across 1) Business types, 2) BIAs in which the businesses are located, and 3) the size of the businesses.

Twenty businesses were selected for interviews and in-person visits. The interviews were conducted over a period of three days. The goal of the one-on-one interviews was to gain primary information from the field, understand community members' main concerns, and learn the strategies being used to tackle change in the community.

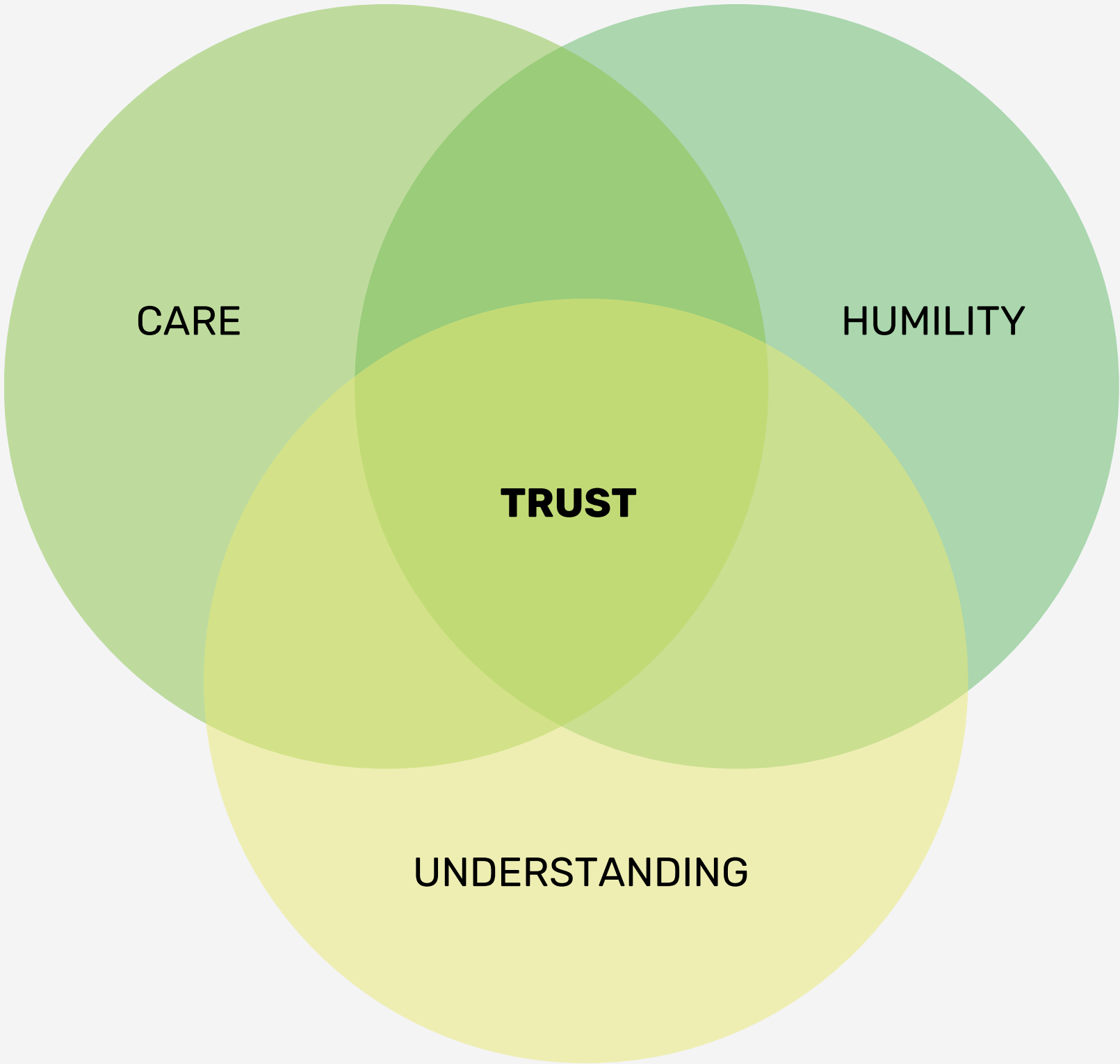
The interviews were structured around the following themes:

1. **Challenges and Concerns:** What are specifically the challenges that Black businesses face in Little Jamaica?
2. **Strategies:** What strategies have you been using to sustain profits and/or attract customers?
3. **Opportunities:** Are you seeing any emerging opportunities for new business/retail/investment? What might they be?
4. **Supports:** What supports are you aware of, or have accessed in the past 5 years? What supports do you need to sustain/grow your business

CONSULTATION STRATEGY – HOW WE ENGAGED

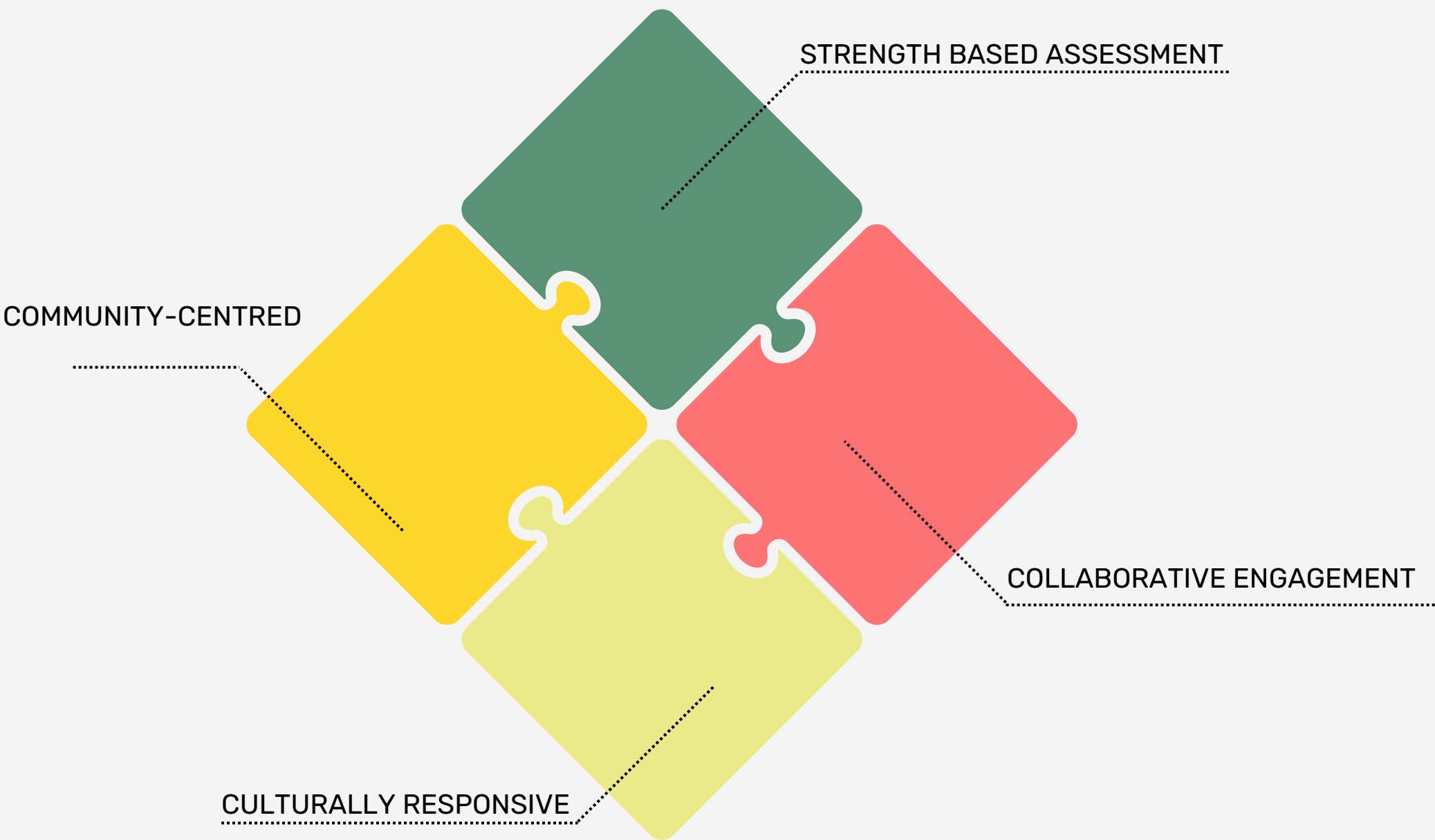
Prior to engaging with the Black business community, we collected and reviewed reports and articles that gave us an understanding of the challenges they were facing. Taking the time to develop this understanding beforehand was critical to the success of the engagement and displayed the care and attention we put into the project.

Trust was at the heart of our engagement. To foster community trust, we worked closely with BBPA and relied on the introductions the organization provided us. BBPA has had an established reputation among the business community, having provided technical assistance and other support for several years. Michele Halsall the Program Manager at BBPA, had extensive experience in the area and had built relationships with business owners and community leaders through her position. Her presence and commitment to this project allowed the Black Planning Project to gain legitimacy within the community and increase the willingness of participation in the one-on-one consultations.



CONSULTATION STRATEGY - ASSET-BASED APPROACH

The consultations were designed with a strong focus on an asset-based approach whereby we wanted to understand the concerns and challenges but also discuss strategies to reach desired outcomes. This approach focuses mainly on employing strategy and mapping out how to get there. This approach is important because its centered around the agency of the community by actively listening to creative problem solving approaches. This view allows for open dialogue, and thus strengthens brainstorming efforts for solutions.



ONE-ON-ONE INTERVIEWS

THE ONE-ON-ONE INTERVIEWS WERE IMPORTANT TO BUILD PERSONAL CONNECTIONS WITH BUSINESS OWNERS AND UNDERSTAND THEIR FIRST HAND PERSPECTIVE IN THEIR SETTINGS.

Nine interviews were conducted in June 2024 with Black business owners in Little Jamaica in the Eglinton Hill BIA (3), Fairbank Village BIA (3) and York Eglinton BIA (3). From a list of 20, 11 businesses were unavailable for interview for one of the following reasons: owner was not present, the store was closed, the owner/ employee was too busy to conduct the survey, and/or the owner was not interested in participating.

The interviews were all held within the businesses and ran for 30 minutes to an hour and half. The conversation was semi-structured, allowing business owners to elaborate and add points as they saw fit.

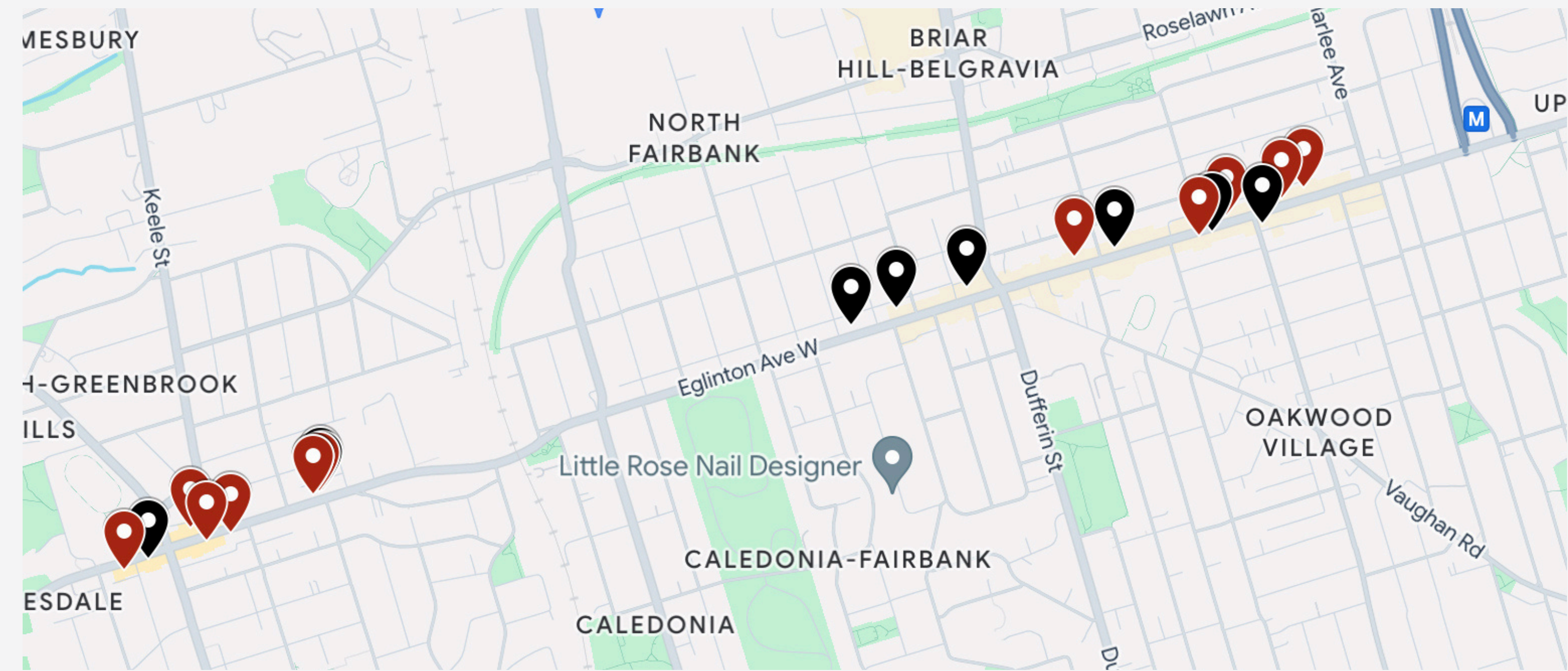
The interviews allowed us to gain insight on business owner sentiments (challenges, strategies, opportunities, supports) in the following categories:

- Physical surroundings
- Space
- Financing
- Clients
- Technical assistance



WWW.WESTENDPHONEIX.COM

ONE-ON-ONE INTERVIEWS



 **BUSINESSES INTERVIEWED**

- FOOD SERVICES**
 - Natural Vibes Juice Bar
 - Sheryl’s Carribean Cuisine
- MISCELLANEOUS RETAILERS**
 - Sovereign Smoke
 - Black Diamond Art Gallery
- CONVENIENCE AND SPECIALTY BUSINESSES**
 - Sunlight Bakery
 - ARC Tree Family Grocery Store
- PERSONAL CARE SERVICES**
 - Mad Art Tattoo
 - Elegance
 - U-2 Fly Cut
 - Jamall Carribean Custom Tailor

BLACK BUSINESS OWNER PROFILES

Newcomer Business



YEARS IN LITTLE JAMAICA

ASSETS:

BRINGING NEW ENERGY INTO
COMMUNITY
KNOW HOW TO LEVERAGE SOCIAL
MEDIA TO ATTRACT CUSTOMERS

CURRENT NEEDS:

CONNECTIVITY WITH OTHER BLACK
OWNED BUSINESSES

Legacy Business owner



YEARS IN LITTLE JAMAICA

ASSETS:

INVALUABLE KNOWLEDGE OF LITTLE
JAMAICA
DEEP CONNECTIONS WITH COMMUNITY
MEMBERS

CURRENT NEEDS:

SUPPORT WITH MEDIA LITERACY

Woman Entrepreneur



YEARS IN LITTLE JAMAICA

ASSETS:

HIGHLY INVOLVED IN COMMUNITY
ORGANIZING IN LITTLE JAMAICA
CONNECTIONS WITH STUDENTS IN
COMMUNITY

CURRENT NEEDS:

ACCESS TO GRANT FUNDING

WHAT MADE THE INTERVIEWS SUCCESSFUL?

CONNECTING IN-PERSON

A key element of the success of the interviews was the on the ground in person interviews. This one-on-one engagement created an atmosphere of trust and care and led to lengthy and profound conversations. By introducing a young Black woman to conduct interviews who was friendly and disarming led many community members to be comfortable speaking freely. As well as being an outsider to the community, yet a representative of the BPP who has established itself as a long time community consultant, with a history of working with Black communities allowed for a sense of trust to be built based on expertise. As a younger person many felt that our interviewer did not represent authority and made the situation more open.

FLEXIBILITY AND OPENNESS

The approach for the interviews was chosen to maximize the level of comfort for the business owners. In that vein, no interviews were recorded, and that allowed for people to speak more freely. Many questions were open ended and were not restricted to one answer allowing respondents to speak deeply on what resonated with them particularly. The goal was to listen and not mine information. Notes were taken on paper and the interviewees were provided a printed copy of the questions if needed.

ONE-ON-ONE INTERVIEWS – WHAT WE HEARD

CHALLENGES

- **Displacement:** The LRT development delays and changing neighbourhood demographics have brought different values and people into the community. The loss of Black community members has minimized core supporters leading to a shrinking reliable clientele. Frequent rent increases and fluctuation have caused some business owners to consider moving elsewhere with concerns of being pushed out by landlords. Only 1 out of the 10 businesses surveyed owned the building their business was in.
- **Loss of Community:** The majority of survey respondents set up their businesses in Little Jamaica with the explicit intention of being part of the Black and Caribbean diasporic community. However, with the loss of many Black owned businesses since the beginning of the LRT construction a diminishing sense of community was duly noted. There was a dependency on regulars to maintain the cultural connection which newcomers to the area may not provide.
- **Business Sustainability:** Raising service prices to stay profitable has the potential to drive away clients who cannot afford the higher costs. In addition, when the LRT does finally open there is a fear that there may be less impetus for foot traffic. Instead, people will use the LRT to cross Eglinton and skip over their businesses all together.

STRATEGIES

- **Social media:** Of those who did find strategies to attract customers within the area, many pointed to the increased use of social media. Namely, Tiktok, Instagram and Facebook. Business owners were leveraging social media platforms to reach a broader audience by creating engaging content to build a following which would hopefully translate to more customers.

SUPPORTS

- **Need for grant funding:** Almost all interviewees said that increased grant funding would better support them. Whether that would be to invest in renovations of the interior and exterior space, get new signage, buy more inventory or hire someone for social media.
- **Need for the consolidation of information:** Many business owners shared that there was disparate sources of information regarding community meetings, BIA meetings and grant funding applications. Also, because of the numerous organizations supporting the community (i.e. BUTO, BBPA.), there was general confusion about who to speak to about certain issues. With the siloing of information, many business owners were frustrated and felt little tangible support.
- **Need for marketing support:** A few businesses expressed a need for more support with social media, content creation and digital marketing. As small business owners with lots of responsibilities and small teams, the marketing aspect was often a low priority despite its potential value.

Tailoring supports to the needs of the community

Newcomer Business



YEARS IN LITTLE JAMAICA

CURRENT NEEDS:
CONNECTIVITY WITH OTHER BLACK OWNED BUSINESSES

HOW CAN THEY BE SUPPORTED?

SHORT TERM

ATTEND REGULAR BIA/ COMMUNITY MEETINGS

LONG TERM

PARTNER DIRECTLY WITH OTHER BLACK OWNED BUSINESSES

Legacy Business owner



YEARS IN LITTLE JAMAICA

CURRENT NEEDS:
SUPPORT WIT DIGITAL MEDIA

HOW CAN THEY BE SUPPORTED?

SHORT TERM

WORKSHOP TO LEARN BASICS OF DIGITAL MEDIA

LONG TERM

PARTNERING WITH STUDENT VOLUNTEER FOR SOCIAL MEDIA SUPPORT

Woman Entrepreneur



YEARS IN LITTLE JAMAICA

CURRENT NEEDS:
ACCESS TO GRANT FUNDING

HOW CAN THEY BE SUPPORTED?

SHORT TERM

ACCESS TO LIST OF AVAILABLE GRANTS

LONG TERM

SUPPORT FROM BBPA/ A PROFESSIONAL TO HELP WITH GRANT APPLICATIONS

COMMUNITY CONSULTATION - OVERVIEW

THE PURPOSE

The community consultation was held on Tuesday, June 25th @ 9:30am. The purpose of the event was to bring together a diverse set of stakeholders to discuss the findings from the one-on-one interviews and share their perspectives to help inform the retail strategy. The consultation allowed us to uncover if certain challenges, strategies or opportunities resonated more widely within the community.

TIMING

The event started at 9:30am to allow business owners to attend before having to open their businesses (typically around 11am). Due to the early start, breakfast was served as well as lunch for those who were able to stick around to the end of the event at 11am.

OUTREACH

Michele (BBPA) was instrumental in the outreach process as she was able to contact business owners directly via text or phone. Another strategy was leaving flyers at the BBPA in the community office which sees many daily visitors. The flyer was also on the BPP socials and on the @thelittlejamaica Instagram account with over 3,700 followers. Lastly, all Black business owners from the interviews and community members met during the interviews were personally emailed with the consultation information.

LOCATION

The location of the community consultation was intentionally chosen at T& J Humppy's. The restaurant is in the heart of Little Jamaica and a neighborhood staple. It was very important to centralize community level engagement throughout the process, including supporting a Black owned business for this event.



COMMUNITY CONSULTATION - OVERVIEW

CONSULTATION AGENDA

9.30	Welcome and Team Introduction	10.10	What we Heard - Your Review/Feedback on Ideas (Individual)
9.35	Agenda Overview	10.15	Envisioning success (purpose & approach) (Small Group / Table Talks)
9.40	Participant Introductions	10.20	Envisioning success - Sharing your stories of success (Small Group / Table Talks)
9.50	Retail Strategy Background	10.35	Envisioning success - Identifying ideas for Success (Small Group / Table Talks)
10.00	What we Heard (strategies & concerns) - Interview Results	10.45	Immediate actions for Black business success

COMMUNITY CONSULTATION - IN ACTION

WHO WAS THERE?

Invitations were sent out through the BBPA's contact list and BBPA social media. Twenty people were present including BIA members, the BBPA, Black Urbanism Toronto, Black business owners, community members of over 40 years and a City of Toronto representative.



BLACK BUSINESSES



NON PROFIT AND COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS



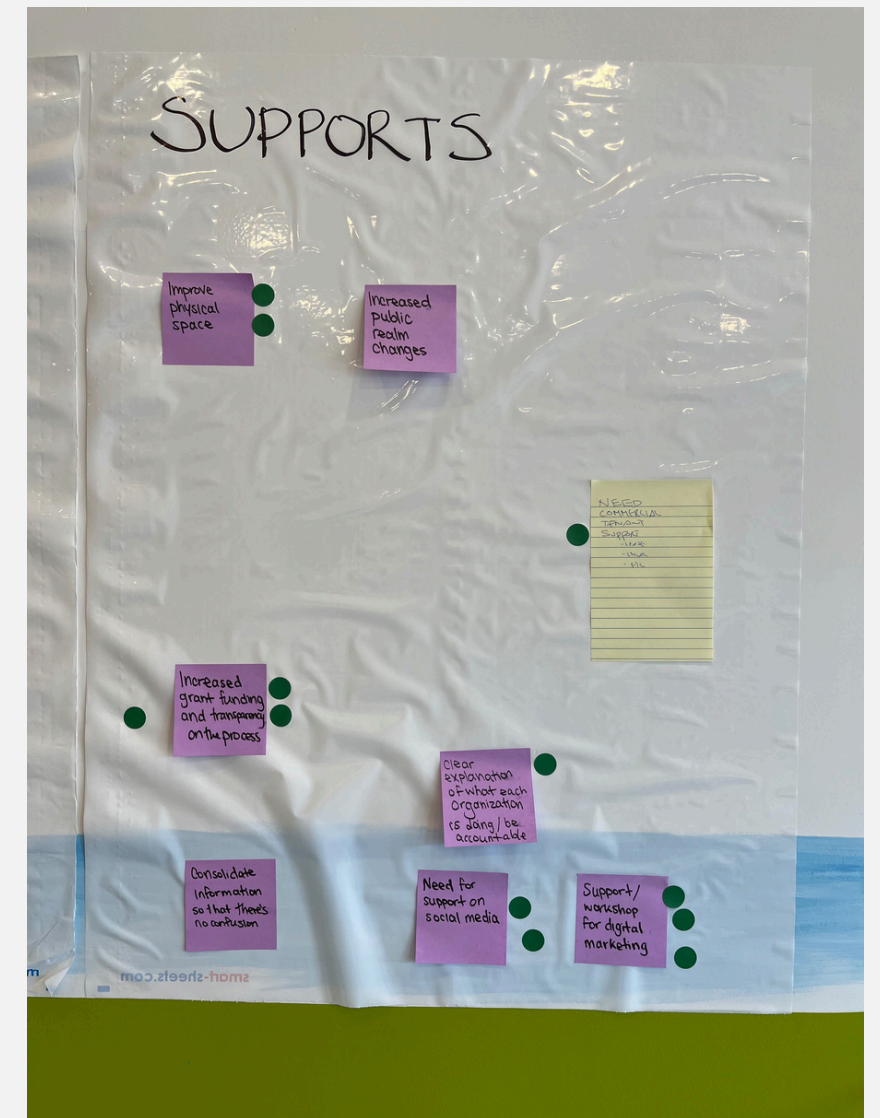
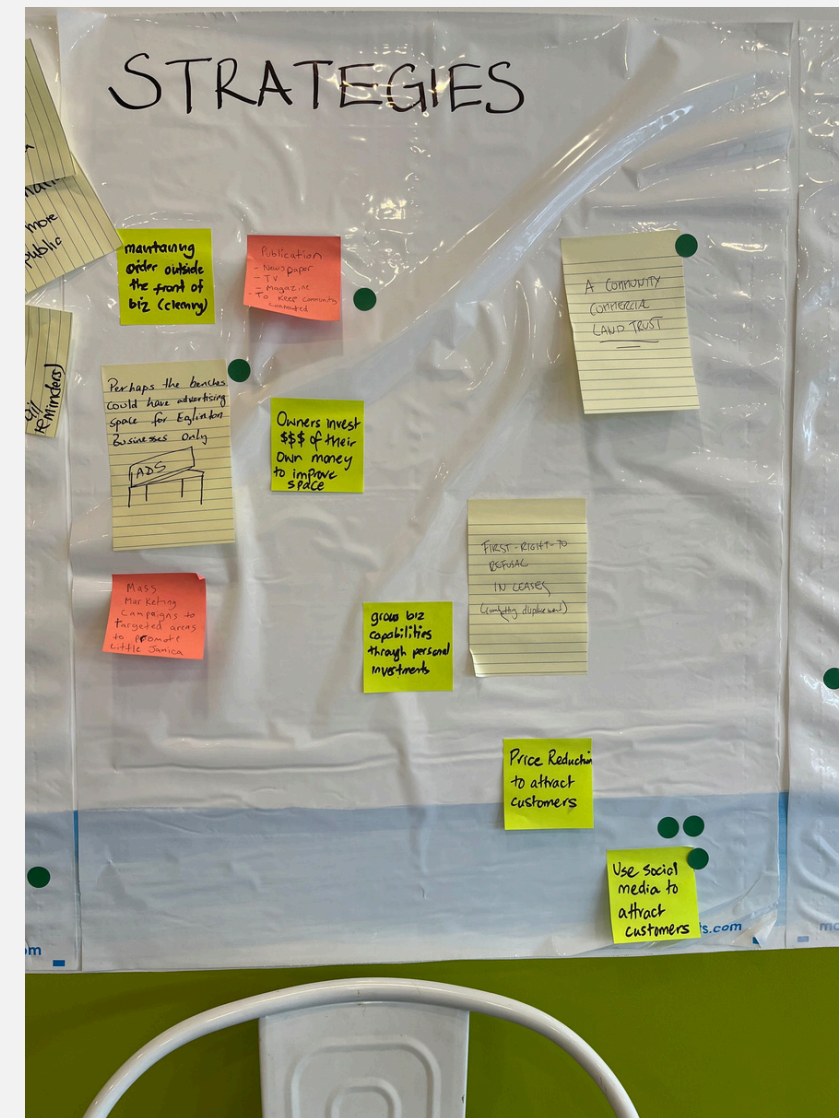
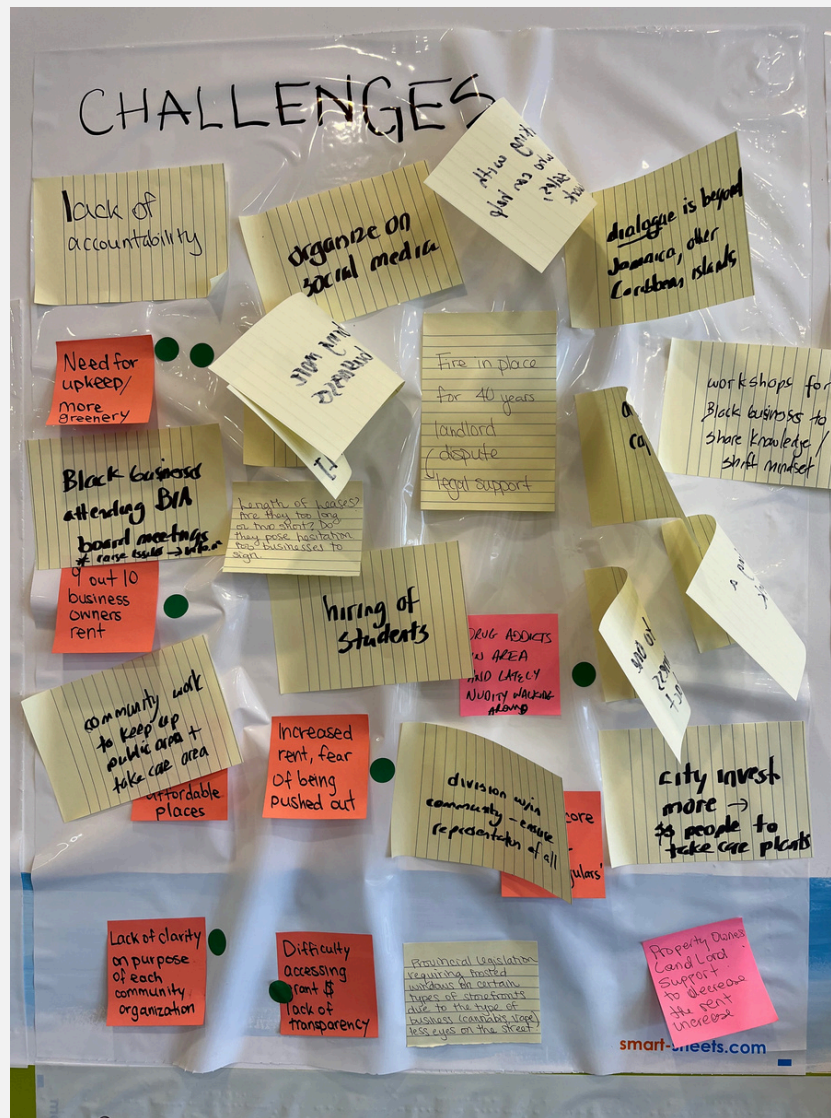
GOVERNMENT AND CITY OFFICIALS



BUSINESS IMPROVEMENT AREAS



COMMUNITY CONSULTATION - ACTIVITIES



The activity from the agenda that was most widely engaged during the consultation was “ Share your thoughts on what we heard”. During this activity stakeholders were given an opportunity to review themes from the one-on- interviews and add their thoughts. We did not start from a blank slate for this activity as we put up “what we heard” post its on the wall and encouraged participants to respond to the notes or add more.

If they agreed with ideas (whether concerns, challenges, opportunities or strategies) they placed a green dot next to each post-it/card, using the sticky dots provided. This activity was successful in identifying shared sentiments, encouraged participants to propose new ideas to add and led to tangible recommendations being suggested.

COMMUNITY CONSULTATION – FINDINGS

CHALLENGES

- Need for upkeep and more greenery in the community
- Lack of ownership of buildings for business owners (8 out of 9 rented based on the one-on-one interviews conducted)
- Routine increases in rent causing business owners to fear being pushed out of the space
- Difficulty accessing grant funding and a lack of transparency of the process
- Increased presence of nudity and mentally ill people in the community

STRATEGIES

- Creation of a publication / TV program to keep the community connected
- A community commercial land trust
- Use of social media to attract customers

OPPORTUNITIES

- More public benches and chairs outside along Eglinton West
- Creation of dialogue between businesses with a focus on unity rather than competition
- New signage with municipal or provincial cultural heritage protection
- Diversification of business owners client bases to drive new business

SUPPORTS

- Improved physical space (interior and exterior)
- Increased grant funding access and transparency on the process
- Clear explanation of what each organization in the community is doing and an accountability metric
- Need for support on social media content creation
- Targeted workshop for digital marketing
- Need for legal support to combat displacement

COMMUNITY SENTIMENT

- Lack of connection to new community members
- Feeling loss of cultural connection



RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE COMMUNITY

ONE-ON-ONE INTERVIEW RECOMMENDATIONS

PHYSICAL SURROUNDINGS

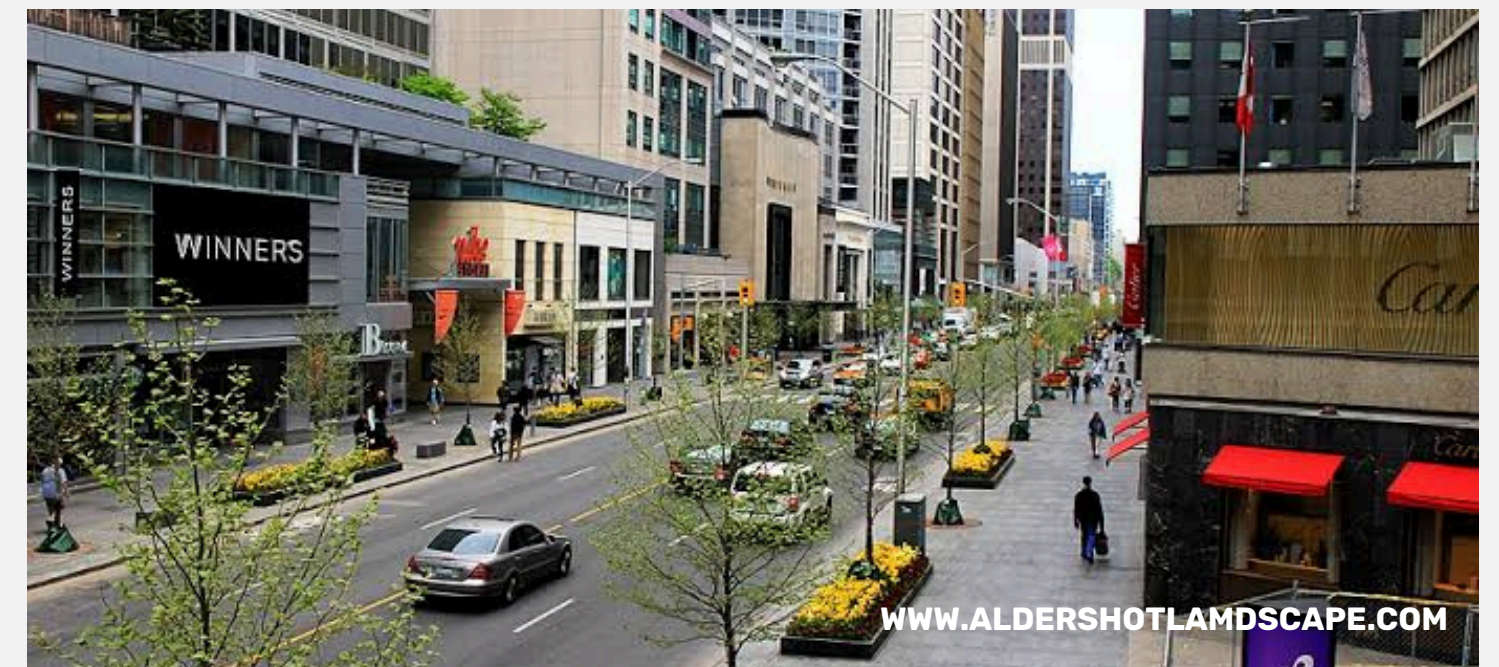
- Increased beautification initiatives along the street (i.e, plants, trees, flowers).
- Having clear visual markers of Little Jamaica (i.e., Danforth “Welcome to Greektown” banners.)

TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

- Create more dialogue for partnerships among businesses.
- Clearly state which organizations are supporting the community and for what purpose (What differentiates them? What are they working on?) - There is currently a level of confusion surrounding the ecosystem of organizations in the community and their purpose

FINANCING

- Increased transparency regarding grant selection process
- Access to more capital



COMMUNITY CONSULTATION RECOMMENDATIONS



THE FOLLOWING RECOMMENDATIONS RECEIVED ONE OR MORE “GREEN DOTS” MEANING THEY RESONATED MOST WITH THE PARTICIPANTS.

PHYSICAL SURROUNDINGS

- Exclusive advertising space for Eglinton businesses on the benches in Little Jamaica
- Increased physical markers in the area (e.g. flags)

TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

- Workshops held at the BBPA for the community office for Black business owners that cater to their needs (i.e., intro digital marketing)
- Hiring students from high school, college and university to work in the community
- Increased tourism support from the City of Toronto to promote Little Jamaica
- Database which centralizes all information Little Jamaica business owners need from a BIA meeting schedule to their tenant rights
- Creation of a network of professionals (lawyers, accountants) who can support Little Jamaica business owners
- Increase team size for BBPA for the community office



CONCLUSION AND NEXT STEPS

The Little Jamaica community consultation was very insightful and created a strong foundation to inform the Little Jamaica retail strategy. The recommendation section highlights the main needs and supports business owners have on their minds.

The main findings from the community consultation were:

INCREASED TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE



BETTER PHYSICAL SURROUNDINGS



ACCESS TO INFORMATION



ACCESS TO CAPITAL



Business owners expressed their need for more technical assistance such as digital marketing, IT support and grant writing. They are shared the need for more beautification efforts in the community as well as physical markers specific to Little Jamaica. The community also highlighted the need for a centralized database for information that pertains to grant applications, BIA information, and events in community. A large number of businesses also expressed interest in gaining better access to capital to scale and improve their businesses.

NEXT STEPS

The results of this community consultation will be used to inform the Little Jamaica Retail Strategy set to be released in September 2025.

Both the consultation summary as well as the retail strategy will be shared back with the community and all the stakeholders who engaged in the project.

WORKS CITED

Cadastre, R. (2021, August 27). BBPA In The Community: Eglington West <https://bbpa.org/bbpa-in-the-community-eglington-west/>

Kong, S. (2023, October 25). “Neglected for Years, Black Business Owners in Little Jamaica Are Saving Themselves.” West End Phoenix, <https://www.westendphoenix.com/stories/black-business-owners-in-little-jamaica-are-saving-themselves>



We thank all those who participated in the consultations and shared with us their knowledge and experiences. We celebrate the power of their spirits and the strength of their community.

A special thank you to Michele Halsall, who was instrumental in the shaping of this project and in convening its participants to reflect, ideate, and share.

Finally we would like to thank Avery Sabeta for her role in this project, for going door to door and having respectful conversations with the participants, for making them feel heard and acknowledged.