

MALVERN FARMERS' MARKET LISTENING PROJECT



Project Overview

The Malvern Farmers' Market Listening Project is a community-based research and action initiative that explores what communities in Malvern want for the future of their neighbourhood and city, and how climate action can be harnessed to act on these priorities. This project was carried out as part of the Just Transitions in Action project, which aims to understand how to accelerate low carbon transitions in urban environments while preventing this widespread transformation from exacerbating inequalities.

A series of 15 community engagement sessions were hosted at the Malvern Farmers' Market for the project over 2023 and 2024, co-designed by Malvern Family Resource Centre (MFRC) and researchers at University of Toronto Scarborough.



Research methods and activities

Sessions engaged community members in discussion around what they perceive as strengths, issues, and visions or priorities for Malvern and/or Scarborough; their knowledge and ideas for food security solutions; and their perceptions of climate action and how it might advance priorities for the neighbourhood.

We utilized a mixed-methods approach, setting up a booth with interactive posters and game-based activities, approaching people at the market with question prompts, and facilitating discussion-based workshops. Throughout 2023 and 2024 listening sessions, participants were also invited to review and provide feedback on the collected and analyzed data. This community-based peer review process helped us to refine our understanding of the data while also prompting further conversations. Data collected includes researcher fieldnotes, participant responses on posters and worksheets, and participatory mapping outputs.



Approximately 180 people participated across 15 sessions, including folks of diverse genders, ethnicities, cultures, and ages. We estimate that the majority of people we spoke to were women, above 40 years of age, and of South Asian, African, and/or Caribbean descent. Most shared that they lived or worked close to MFRC.

Data was analyzed using inductive thematic analysis to identify community members' priorities for their neighbourhood and city, and how they connected these priorities to climate action. Scholarly and grey literature was then reviewed for evidence of links between each priority and just climate action

Findings

Priorities related to food

Many of our activities focused on the topic of food because of MFRC's interest in and efforts to advance local food security. Additionally, community engagement sessions took place at the Malvern Farmers' Market, where local, community-grown food is sold. As a result, food was central in our discussions around community priorities and climate action.

The figure below summarizes key community priorities related to food that emerged through these engagements.

- Access to affordable, local, healthy, and organic food via local grocers, farmers' markets, and farmers directly.
- Bring about food security through urban agriculture, price regulations, economic supports, increasing income and job opportunities, food availability and access programs (including food banks), a centralized and intersectional governance approach, and community education, organizing, and solidarity.
- Ample space, opportunities, and government supports to learn about and engage in local, community-owned food production.
- Community awareness and engagement with food issues.
- Food banks with equitable distribution and diverse, nutritious food options.
- Healthy cooking and eating knowledge, habits, and programs in the community.



6 other priorities for the neighbourhood and city also emerged during our community engagements. These are summarized in the table below.

Community Connection	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feelings of connection among community members. • Address sources of isolation and displacement pressures. • Opportunities and events for people to gather. • Protect and create valued community spaces. • Accessibility and inclusion in community activities and events.
Walkability, Density, and Business Diversity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Walkable communities with nearby access to stores, jobs, and community spaces. • High density and diversity of stores in the neighbourhood, including the introduction of stores that are currently lacking • Prevent the loss of Malvern Mall and other local, affordable, and diverse shopping hubs..
Public Transportation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local subway and high-speed transit routes. • Dense and widespread transit coverage that can get you anywhere, with few dead spots and small distances to transit stops. • Transit service that is frequent and on-time. • Free, subsidized, and/or affordable transit for all. • Electrified mass transit system. • Transit system that is accessible for all, including Wheel Trans services with reduced transfers and direct transportation. • Completion of transportation projects that are underway. • Measures to enhance safety on public transportation.
Community Programs and Services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community centres, public libraries, and community organizations that support residents, conduct civic engagement, and provide opportunities for community members to have fun. • Diversity of community programs, services, and resources that are offered on a flexible schedule and well-connected to those who need them. • Programs and services that are oriented to a wider range of community members, including teenagers, neurodiverse youth, youth who have disabilities, people who speak languages other than English, and people in their 30s-40s. • Opportunities for community members to participate in local organizations' projects.

Affordability

- Actions to address rising cost of living.
- Affordable local housing, transit, education, food, and clothing.
- Social benefits that ensure a livable income.

Employment

- Employment opportunities for everyone.
- Local job opportunities that are within walking distance.
- Proactive planning to ensure meaningful job opportunities in the face of technological innovation and shifting markets.
- Local volunteer opportunities and training centres where community members can develop work experience.
- Employment supports for newcomers, including social services, language centres, and well-paying jobs.

**How do community members understand climate action?**

Several engagement activities prompted community members to share their knowledge and perceptions of climate change and actions. We asked open-ended questions, prompting participants to describe climate change, provide examples of climate action, and share their perceptions and opinions on this issue more broadly. Responses are summarized in the table below.

Climate change drivers

- Increasing carbon emissions
- Abundance of vehicles on the road

Climate change impacts

- Increasing temperatures
- Increasing prices
- More extreme and frequent natural disasters
- Harm to the health of people, air, and the environment
- Climate change is linked to food insecurity.
- Wildfires, excessive rain, and hot summers harm crops and affect how long food lasts.
- Pollution reduces the quality of the air, rain, water, and food.
- Climate change affects everyone
- Climate change will have greater impacts on future generations.

Examples of climate action

- Waste reduction, including medical and food waste
- Recycling
- Climate events
- Community and urban gardens
- Education on the preparation of healthy, fresh food
- Carpooling
- Walking
- Buying food and other goods locally
- Clean neighbourhood and environment
- Lawn mowing services
- Clean up of clothes, homes, etc.

Climate actions that are needed

- Change the way we live
- Increase the abundance and affordability of both active and public transportation infrastructure.
- Reduce construction in agricultural areas
- Reduce chemicals in food
- Address plastic and environmental pollution
- Keep the carbon tax.

Responsibility for climate action

- The government needs to take environmental and climate action without placing the financial burden on community members.
- Climate action is a government responsibility.
- Big corporations have created the problem of climate change and therefore need to be targeted.
- There is a need for communities to initiate and lead this change.

Feasibility of climate action

- The use of public transit is an effective way to reduce emissions, but needs to be more reliable, efficient, pleasant, and potentially above-ground to be a viable mobility option.
 - Cycling could help to reduce climate emissions, but is inhibited by factors such as limited speed, lack of bike lanes, safety concerns, cyclist age, weather conditions, and the availability of other transport means.
 - The desire to own a car to ensure one isn't "left behind in life" limits the use of bikes for transportation.
 - It would be difficult to reduce the level of polluting due to societal lock-in, and to increase composting in the face of logistical challenges.
 - Climate change cannot be solved.
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How do community members connect their priorities to climate action?

In several sessions, we utilized posters to guide participants to draw links between a list of priorities, of actions that would simultaneously advance this priority and tackle climate change, and of social, economic, and/or climate-related benefits that might result. In other sessions, we asked more open-ended questions about how specific priorities relate to climate action. Findings from these activities are summarized in the table below.



Public, active, and alternative transportation

- A strong public transit system could create jobs, support a thriving community, and reduce pollution.
- A strong and affordable public transportation system improves mobility and reduces GHG emissions through reducing car use.
- Walking is a climate action that promotes health and connections to nature.
- Carpooling is a climate action that can help people to save money and can be facilitated through community connection.

Density and walkability

- Business density reduces travel distances and greenhouse gas emissions.
- High business density can support climate action if local businesses contribute to community composting initiatives and share suppliers.

Food access and production

- Community gardens are a community priority and a climate action.
- Urban farms support climate action through organic, local food production, which also positively impacts our health.
- Large scale food programs can support access to healthy food and reduce climate impacts.
- Farming deepens connections to nature.

Employment

- Employment and climate action can be fostered through educational programs and events focused on climate change, investments in climate or green jobs, and efforts to clean pollution.

What does research say about how climate action can address these priorities?

Scholarly and grey literature was reviewed for evidence of links between each community priority and just climate action. Findings are summarized in the table below.

Food Access and Production	Efforts to develop local food initiatives, such as urban farms, community gardens, edible cities, and farmers' markets, can reduce greenhouse gas emissions associated with food mileage and food waste while enhancing local food security. These initiatives can also create building blocks for more sustainable and just food systems, particularly through enabling racialized, low-income, and migrant community members to produce, access, and consume healthy and culturally appropriate foods.
Community Connection	Meaningful social connections can strengthen local climate mitigation and adaptation efforts, as people are moved to take action by their sense of attachment to their neighbourhood and those who are a part of it. Climate actions, when carried out collectively, can also foster community bonds. Examples include community gardens, farmers' markets, educational activities, and social and environmental activism.
Walkability, Density, and Business Diversity	Dense, mixed-use urban spaces can increase participation in low-carbon transportation by enabling efficient public transit systems, reducing travel distances and commutes, and creating local retail and employment opportunities. These efforts must be paired with rent control, affordable housing development, and displacement prevention measures. Densification should also be guided by an understanding of the needs, identities, and lives of local marginalized groups to maintain the character of the neighbourhood, people's sense of place, and community cohesion.
Public Transportation	Improving the supply of and access to low-carbon, climate friendly options such as bicycle-lanes, buses, and light-rail, as well as electrification of public transport, will strengthen public transportation systems, reduce reliance on cars, lessen traffic, and improve transportation experiences.

Community Programs and Services

Investments in community programs and services aimed at providing forms of care – including childcare, education, social services, and mental health support – will help mitigate the climate crisis. The care industry not only sustains people's lives and well-being, but is low-emissions and labour-intensive, making it an important avenue for low-carbon jobs. Community organizations can also increase people's capacities to adapt to climate change through providing social supports, building social connections, and fostering resource- and knowledge-sharing.

Affordability

Initiatives such as local clothing swaps, community gardens, and repair cafes enable people to access and maintain goods at a lower cost, reduce material and energy use, and foster alternative economic and community relations that enable low-carbon living and equitable sharing of resources. Climate actions can also be designed to create more affordable housing, transportation, and food systems, as well as push forward local economies that do not perpetuate extraction and inequity.

Employment

Climate action can be designed to stimulate local employment through investments in the decarbonization and climate-proofing of the built environment, social procurement of goods and services in low-carbon initiatives, and workforce training programs for low-carbon industries

