Identifying Suitable Sites for Social Housing Developments in Toronto

By: Sara Eng | Queen's University

Background Facts

From 2006 – 2016 median owner household income declined by 15% while average home ownership cost grew 60% between 2006 – 2018 in Toronto [1].

The current rental-tenure model is driven by financializing resulting in the increase of gentrification, a process where higher-income tenants are replacing poorer renters [2].

There is roughly one affordable unit for every four low-income households in Toronto, which is the lowest affordability rate in the province [1].

Historically, immigrants have been at high risk in the Toronto housing market since newly arrived immigrants often have limited financial resources [3].

Social housing is a tool the Government of Ontario uses to increase availability of affordable units for households with low-to-moderate incomes [4].

The current number of available social housing units in Toronto is 90,665 with a waitlist of 91,994 households. This waitlist takes between 7-10 years [1].

The goal of this project is to locate the top two most suitable locations for a new social housing development in Toronto, ON in order to increase housing affordability in the city.

Methods

Part 1: Suitability Analysis

- Using Model Builder in ArcMap, a suitability model was built to identify candidate sites for a new social housing development
- The candidate sites must meet the list of criteria to be selected as candidate sites:
  - Near public transit, schools, and grocery stores
  - Away from current social housing locations
  - Within "residential apartment" zoning
  - Within a neighbourhood with a low supply and high demand for social housing
  - Within a neighbourhood with a high population density
  - Within a neighbourhood that has a low housing cost
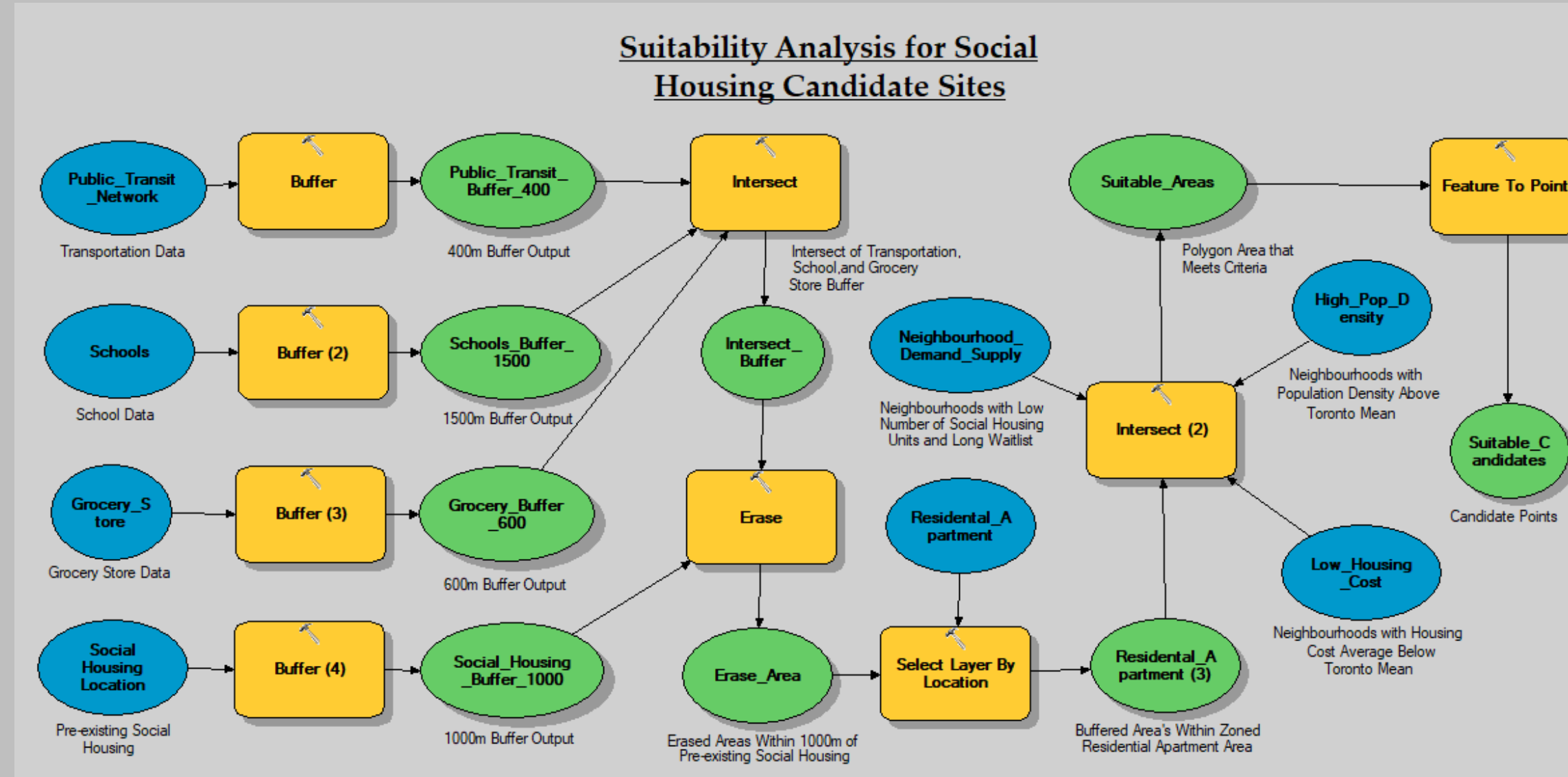 - A minimum of 50m² of open space to build new development

Figure 1: Model Builder for Part 1 Methods

Part 2: Location-Allocation Analysis

- The location-allocation analysis was run using the maximize attendance problem type in ArcMap. This identified the location among the candidate sites which captures the most demand, while accounting for pre-existing social housing developments.
- The location-allocation analysis was run twice to get the top two most ideal sites.
- The inputs for the location-allocation analysis are as followed:
  - Candidate facilities = candidate sites identified in Part 1
  - Required Facilities = Pre-existing social housing locations
  - Demand Points = Center points of each Toronto neighbourhood
  - Weight of Demand Points = Number of people on the social housing waitlist per neighbourhood

Results

First Suitable Site for New Social Housing Location in Agincourt North, Toronto

Figure 2: Imagery view of Site #1

The first suitable site is located in the neighbourhood of **Agincourt North**. The site is located at 5001 Finch Avenue East. The current apartment buildings on the site are called Chartwell Place I and Chartwell Place II, both built by Monarch Group. It is therefore suggested for the City of Toronto to collaborate with Monarch Group to construct a new building on site however, if that is not feasible units in the current apartment are encourages to be converted into social housing units.

Second Suitable Site for New Social Housing Location in Steeles, Toronto

Figure 3: Imagery view of Site #2

The second suitable site is located in the neighbourhood of **Steeles**. The site is located at 125 Bamburgh Circle. If resources are available, it is recommended for the City of Toronto to allocate resources to Site #2 after Site #1 is developed or as an alternative if issues such as ownership, finance, or utility feasibility arise. The current apartment building on Site #2 is owned and constructed by Sterling Karamar Property Management and therefore if Site #1 is chosen, it is advised that the City of Toronto collaborate with the company.

Site #1 and Site #2 were mapped together in reference to the demographic data for each Toronto neighbourhood. Both sites are located in the north east-side of the city where majority of the population is English Second Language (ESL). This result displays that there is a spatial trend in the result of where suitable sites for social housing developments should be. The neighbourhoods of Agincourt North and Steeles are both dominantly Chinese speaking (Mandarin/Cantonese).
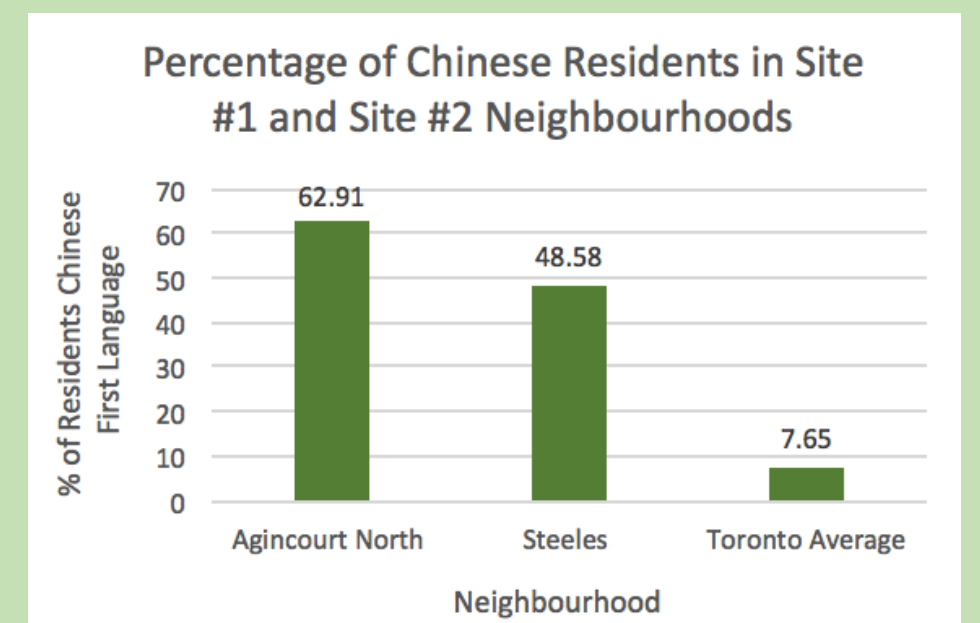

Figure 4: Statistics of the Chinese population in Agincourt North and Steeles neighbourhoods.
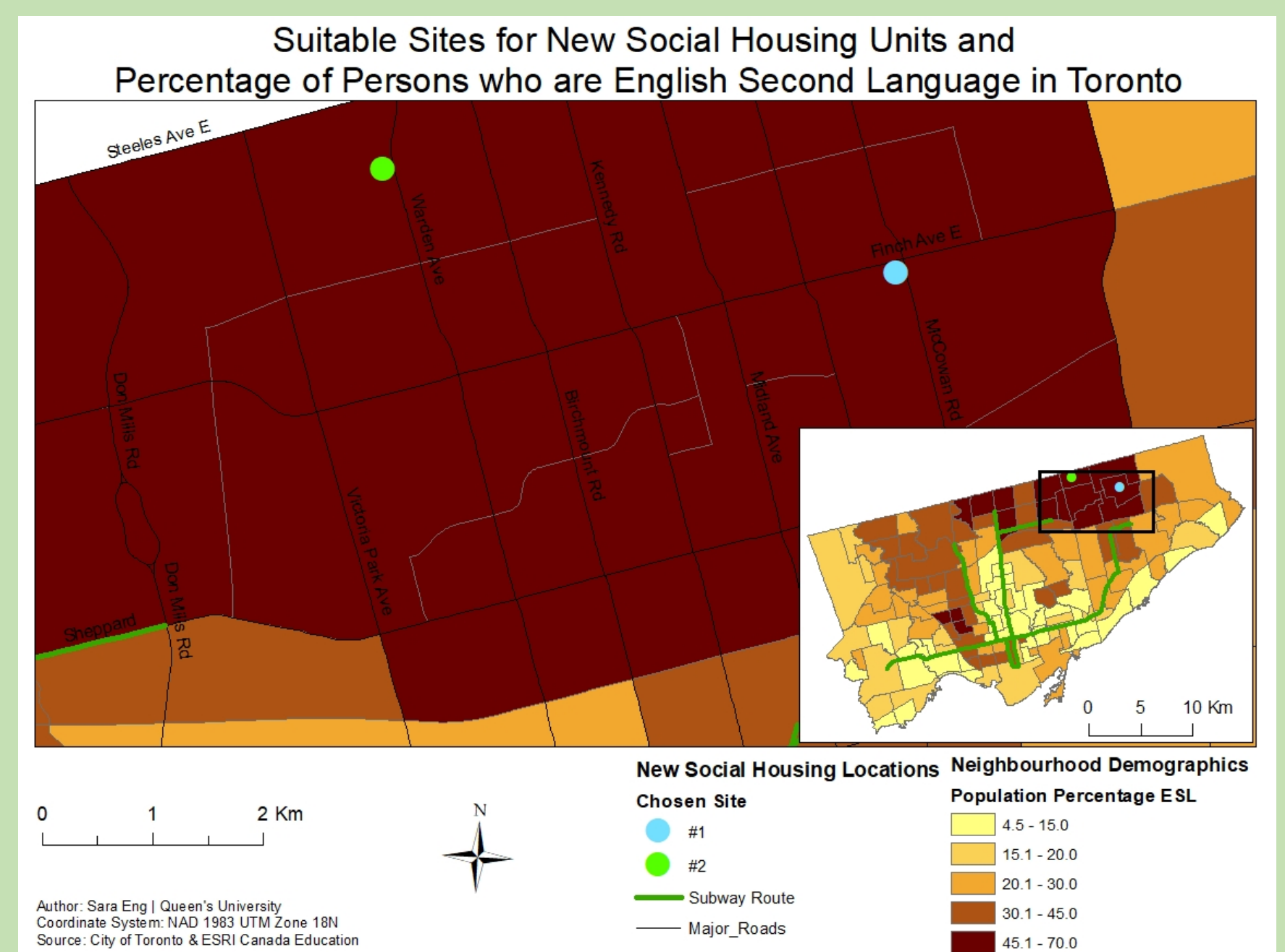

Figure 5: Result from mapping Site #1 and Site #2 locations with neighbourhood demographics.

Conclusion

- Building a new social housing development on one or both suitable sites, will increase the supply of low-income housing which will work to combat the unaffordable housing situation in Toronto.

- Site #1 in Agincourt North and Site #2 in Steeles are the top two ideal locations for a new social housing development as they meet the criterion in the suitability analysis and have the most demand according to the location-allocation analysis.

- Analyzing the locations of the selected sites highlighted the demographic trend of suitable locations in dominantly ESL neighbourhoods which is consistent with previous research regarding housing vulnerability and immigrants.

- The next steps are to understand why Chinese neighbourhoods in Toronto have a high demand for social housing in order to create a proactive approach in mitigating housing unaffordability.

References
[1] City of Toronto. (2019). *Toronto Housing Market Analysis*. Toronto: Canadian Urban Institute & Canadian Centre for Economic Analysis.
[2] August, M., & Walks, A. (2018). Gentrification, suburban decline, and the financialization of multi-family rental housing: The case of Toronto. *Geoforum*, 89, 124–136.
[3] Murdie, R. A., & Teixeira, C. (2003). Towards a comfortable neighbourhood and appropriate housing: Immigrant experiences in Toronto. *The world in a city*, 132-191.
[4] Government of Ontario. (2020, January 27). *Affordable and Social Housing*. Retrieved from Home and Community: https://www.ontario.ca/document/ontario-municipal-councillors-guide 2018/13-affordable-and-social-housing