

*“15 recommendations to rebuild
Black environmental power in the
City” -Toronto
Report to the community - July 2024*



Context

The Black Environmental Initiative seized the opportunity presented by the City of Toronto's consultation to review their "Confronting Anti-Black Racism Strategy", aiming to provide insights into the environmental challenges facing Black communities in Toronto.

Our team organized two in-person community conversations to highlight the concerns of Black Torontonians regarding environmental issues. The first conversation was held on June 29th, 2024, followed by the second on July 13th, 2024.

We extend our gratitude to all community members who participated in our town halls, sharing invaluable insights and fostering open dialogue about how systemic issues impact the physical and mental environments of Black Torontonians. Your contributions helped create brave and safe spaces for these crucial conversations.

Thank you to everyone who joined!

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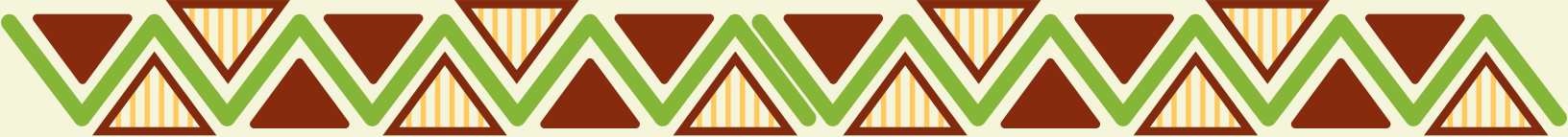
Recommendation 1: The City should address the "environmental education divide" in Black communities by allocating funds and human resources to support long-term environmental storytelling campaigns created for and by Black people.

Rationale:

Unlike other social issues addressed in previous plans, environmental issues often act as "invisible killers." While Black individuals are generally aware of the dangers of police brutality, many are less informed about the deadly impact of pollution, which can be equally, if not more, lethal. Therefore, the initial step in combating this form of anti-Black racism is raising awareness. Anti-Black racism within the environmental sector has created a "Black community environmental education divide," limiting access to tailored environmental campaigns.

How:

- Establish partnerships with educators, local Black environmental organizations, and storytellers (writers, film producers, influencers) to develop annual campaigns targeting multiple generations within the Black community (ages 8 to 90).
- Customize campaigns to align with the media consumption habits of different age groups.



Recommendation 2: The City should integrate Black History initiatives with environmental education campaigns targeted at the Black community. 4.

Rationale:

Historical anti-Black racism has led many to view environmental work as a "white thing." However, the history of Black people is deeply intertwined with environmental history. Efforts to educate Black communities about environmental issues should prioritize retelling Black history through an environmental lens.



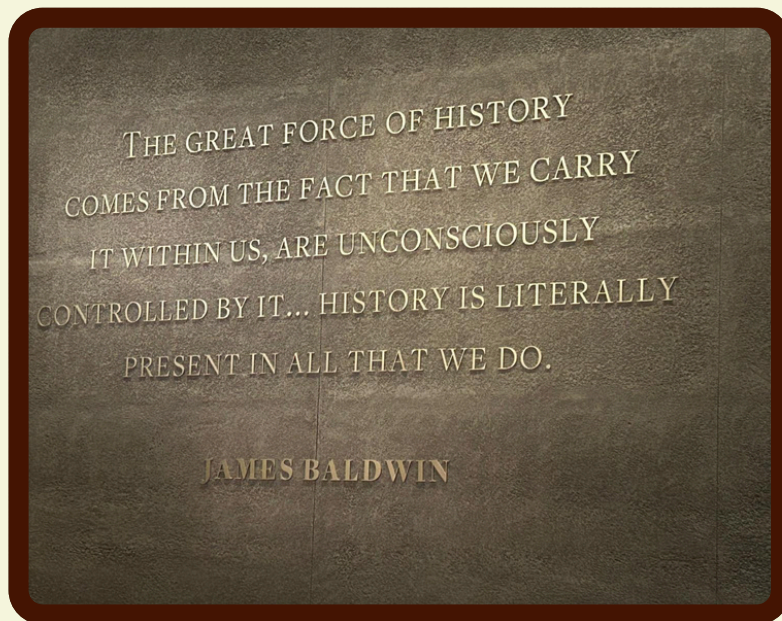
In 1482, the Portuguese constructed Elmina Castle on the Ghanaian coast, marking the onset of European colonialism in West Africa. Initially utilized for gold extraction and transport to Europe, this site is now recognized as a UNESCO World Heritage site.

Since the earliest stages of colonization, the colonial demand for extensive gold exploitation has introduced issues that persist in Black communities today: environmental degradation, local corruption, forced labor, gun violence, and suppression of resistance. This marked one of the earliest episodes of environmental racism. From that point forward, Black history became inseparably linked with the history of the plantation system and global mining.

Recommendation 3: The City should engage Black faith institutions by developing environmental programs within churches, mosques, and other religious spaces.

Rationale:

Some community members have expressed that colonial education has often instilled a fear of reconnecting with ancestral culture and ways of being within Black communities. Environmentalism represents a return to ancestral values for us.



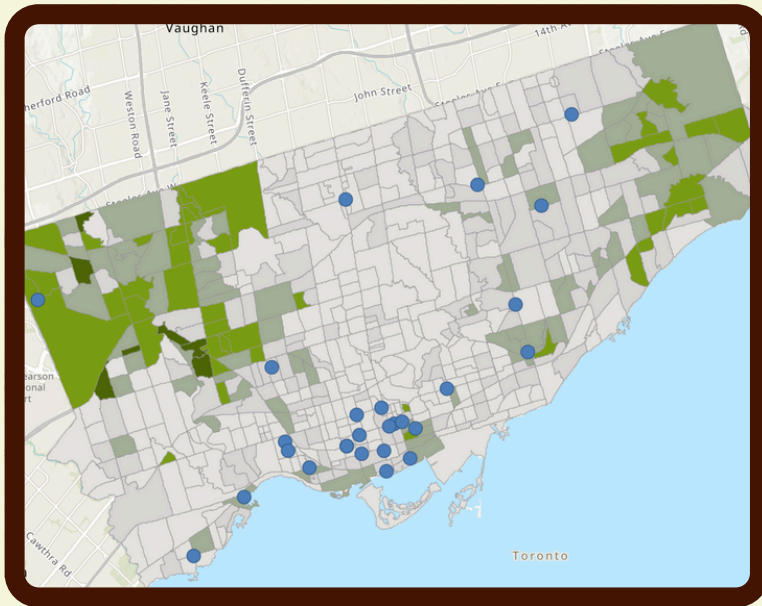
Just as indigenous peoples of the Americas have cultures that center on the respect for nature, many indigenous African cultures also historically maintained a deep spiritual connection to the land.

Given that Black communities often exhibit higher levels of religious involvement compared to non-Black communities, fostering partnerships with faith-based institutions for environmental programs in Black communities is crucial.

Recommendation 4: The City should collect data on Black communities' environmental exposure, gentrification risks, and vulnerabilities to climate change. 6.

Rationale:

If we fail to measure and collect data on Black environmental issues, we will continue to overlook them. Black communities are disproportionately exposed to nitrogen dioxide (NO₂) and particulate matter (PM_{2.5}), which contribute to respiratory and cardiovascular diseases.



We are disproportionately impacted by lead in the water, methane from landfills, indoor and outdoor air pollution in our homes and schools. Additionally, we face challenges such as heat waves, limited access to green spaces, and displacement due to gentrification.

The Black Environmental Initiative recommends funding Black-led environmental squads—teams of trained individuals—to measure and address pollution in neighborhoods. It emphasizes the need to track and measure environmental issues at a hyperlocal level, ideally at the level of dissemination areas.

Recommendation 5: The City should adopt holistic, multi-departmental creative funding models to pool resources for Black environmental protection initiatives.

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Rationale:

The City of Toronto already invests resources through its various departments in community building, health and mental health initiatives, as well as crime reduction efforts.



Research indicates that environmental programs aimed at increasing canopy cover in communities can have positive effects on residents' physical and mental health, and may even reduce community violence.

The City has an opportunity to adopt a holistic approach, considering environmental efforts not as isolated disciplines but as integrated levers for positive change. This approach can significantly impact the health and mental well-being of Black Torontonians and enhance the resilience of Black communities.

Recommendation 6: The City should implement a policy to put a price on food waste generated by corporate events in Toronto.

Rationale:

Food waste that is not composted typically ends up in landfills, where it decomposes and produces methane, a greenhouse gas that is 20 times more potent than CO₂ and can contribute to cancer and chronic health issues.



Research indicates that Black communities in Toronto, such as those in Scarborough and North Etobicoke, have often been located in proximity to landfills, waste transfer stations, and other industrial sites.

In Italy, Law L.166/2016 includes provisions for penalties and sanctions against businesses that waste food without proper justification or fail to donate excess food to charities or food banks. Similarly, France passed the "Loi Garot" (Garot Law) in 2016, which mandates that supermarkets donate unsold food to charities and food banks rather than disposing of it.

Recommendation 7: The City should consider increasing fines^{9.} within the "Green and Blue Bin" programs for non-compliant landlords in predominantly Black neighborhoods.

Rationale:

Many members of the Black community in Toronto reside in apartment buildings where proper waste management separation is often not provided.



Studying the enforcement levels of these regulations in black communities vs non-black communities should be a first step in trying to address a potential disparity.

While the green bin and blue bin programs mandate waste management separation in apartment buildings, enforcement may be lacking, particularly in buildings with predominantly Black renters. The city should increase enforcement efforts in Black neighborhoods to ensure compliance with these policies.

Recommendation 8: The City should allocate land and secure financing for "Black community land trusts" to protect low-income community residents from gentrification. ^{10.}

Rationale:

Gentrification represents a form of environmental racism that disproportionately impacts Black communities. Historically, dozens of Black settlements in Canada have been erased from the map due to gentrification.



Before an area undergoes gentrification, Black communities often endure prolonged disinvestment, resulting in "Black flight," where long-term Black residents leave the neighbourhood in search of better opportunities elsewhere.

It is often only after low-income Black residents leave that municipalities begin making investments to attract higher-income residents. Community land trusts have emerged as one of the best solutions to protect low-income renters from being priced out of their neighborhoods. The City should support these efforts by donating land and facilitating financing for community land trusts.

Recommendation 9: The City should invest in advocacy efforts with the provincial government.

Rationale:

Many community members we have consulted believe that much of the power to change environmental conditions in Toronto's Black communities resides with the provincial government.



For instance, this is true in terms of the building code. Measures to mandate that buildings in the city meet certain levels of air quality fall under provincial jurisdiction. Therefore, the City must advocate at the provincial level for best practices.

A thought that emerged from our discussions was the idea that rural communities often influence political decisions that exacerbate urban challenges for Black people. Therefore, strategies must include raising awareness in rural communities about the realities of anti-Black racism.

Recommendation 10: The City should increase Black agency in infrastructure development and maintenance.

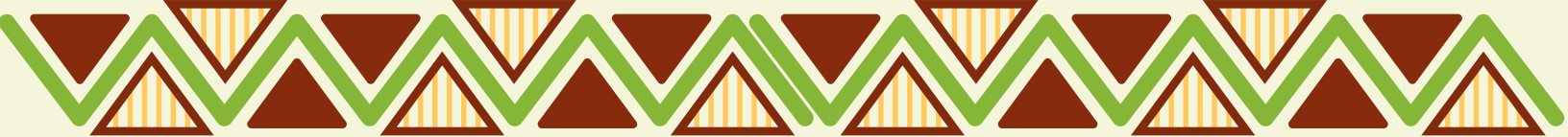
Rationale:

Black communities require infrastructure improvements in schools, community gardens, tree-planting initiatives, and enhancements to public transit.



Many comments from community members reveal that Black communities are underrepresented in decision-making structures concerning urban planning.

Increasing Black representation in urban planning structures is one way to achieve this goal. Additionally, the City can mandate the implementation of Community Benefits Agreements (CBAs) in predominantly Black neighborhoods in Toronto.



Recommendation 11: The City should increase Community Garden Initiatives within Black Communities. 13.

Rationale:

Increasing community garden initiatives within Black communities enhances food security by providing access to fresh, affordable produce and addressing food deserts. These gardens foster social cohesion and community pride by creating communal spaces for collaboration. They promote physical activity and mental well-being, reducing stress and improving overall health.



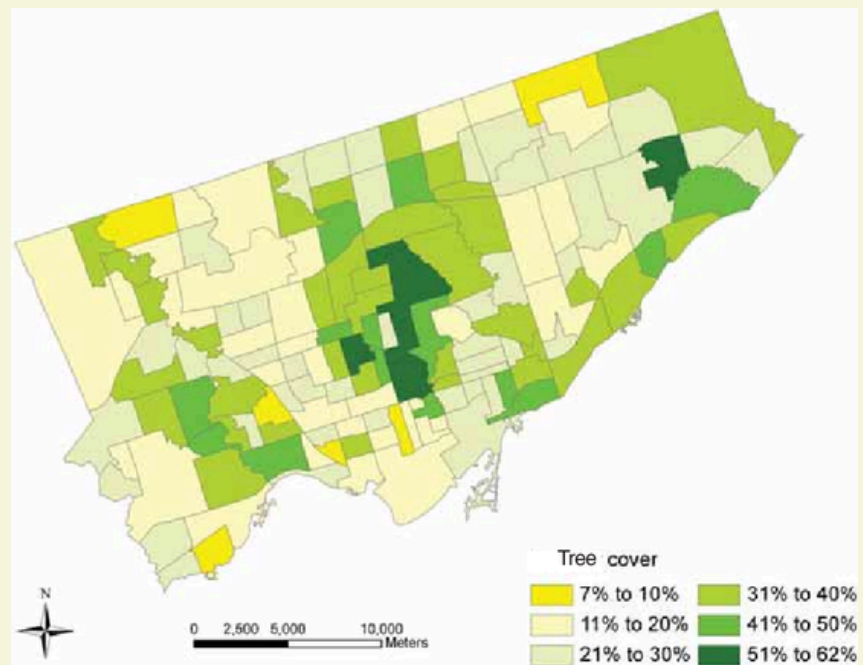
Overall, community garden initiatives support food security, health, education, environmental sustainability, and cultural empowerment.

Community gardens offer hands-on learning experiences in agriculture and sustainability, empowering residents with valuable skills. Additionally, they contribute to urban greening, enhance biodiversity, and support sustainable practices. By allowing the cultivation of culturally significant crops, these gardens also preserve and celebrate cultural heritage.

Recommendation 12: The City should increase urban tree canopy cover within Black Communities.

Rationale:

Increasing urban tree canopy cover in Toronto's Black communities enhances air quality, reduces heat, and lowers energy costs by providing shade. Trees create green spaces that improve mental and physical well-being and contribute to stormwater management by reducing runoff. They also increase property values and foster community pride. Expanding tree cover promotes environmental justice, ensuring these neighbourhoods receive equitable green infrastructure and its associated benefits.



Recommendation 13: Promoting Black ownership within the City.

Rationale:

Promoting Black ownership in Toronto is essential for economic empowerment and social equity. It stimulates economic growth, fosters innovation, and creates job opportunities, contributing to a resilient and inclusive economy. Black-owned businesses often lead in adopting sustainable practices like energy efficiency and waste reduction, advancing environmental goals such as reducing emissions and improving urban biodiversity.

Empowering Black entrepreneurs also strengthens community resilience to climate change and urban challenges, fostering collaborative solutions and environmental justice initiatives. By supporting Black ownership, Toronto can build a sustainable and prosperous future for all residents.



By investing in Black-owned businesses, property ownership, and entrepreneurship, the city can harness the collective potential of diverse communities to create a sustainable and thriving urban environment for all residents.

Recommendation 14: Confronting Not In My Backyard (NIMBY) activism.

Rationale:

Confronting "Not In My Backyard" (NIMBY) activism to address anti-Black racism in Toronto requires a multifaceted approach. The city should engage communities through dialogue sessions and education campaigns to dispel misconceptions and biases that fuel NIMBYism. Transparent planning processes involving diverse stakeholders, including Black community leaders, ensure that concerns are heard and integrated into decisions, building trust and reducing opposition based on misinformation. Developing robust policies and equity impact assessments to identify and mitigate racial biases in planning and development practices is crucial.



City leaders must champion anti-racism initiatives, hold accountable those perpetuating discrimination, and launch public awareness campaigns that challenge stereotypes and promote the benefits of inclusive communities. Collaborating with community organizations and academia to research systemic barriers faced by Black communities strengthens efforts to combat anti-Black racism, fostering a more equitable urban environment.



Recommendation 15: Addressing nutrient deficiencies.

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Rationale:

Addressing nutrient deficiencies in Black communities in Toronto is essential for enhancing individual health and overall community well-being. Nutrient-rich diets improve physical and mental health, reducing the prevalence of chronic diseases such as diabetes, hypertension, and heart disease, which disproportionately affect Black populations. Healthier individuals are more capable of participating in social, economic, and community activities, fostering stronger and more vibrant neighbourhoods. Improved nutrition also supports educational and economic outcomes. Children with adequate nutrition perform better in school, leading to better educational attainment and future job prospects. Adults with good health are more productive and able to contribute positively to the workforce, driving economic growth and stability within their communities.



These 15 recommendations summarize some of the initiatives that the City can launch to address how anti-Black racism impacts Black communities' environments.

Thank you to everyone who joined!

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