THE ULTIMATE

GUIDE TO ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE IN PETERBOROUGH"

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INTRODUCTION

Environmental justice is usually associated with large-scale environmental problems: industrial pollution, contaminated water systems, or climate-related disasters (global warming). Those issues matter, but they are not the only ways people experience environmental inequality. Sometimes it appears in much smaller and more ordinary spaces — places that become so familiar they stop attracting attention.

In Peterborough, public parks and bus stops offer a useful example of this. Across the city, some of these spaces remain relatively clean and maintained, while others repeatedly accumulate litter, overflowing garbage, damaged bins, or visible neglect. On the surface, these may seem like minor issues. Over time, however, they begin to influence how residents experience public space itself.

A poorly maintained bus stop changes how people move through it. Garbage scattered across a park affects whether families would bring their kids there. Repeated neglect sends a message, even when nobody says it directly. Some spaces appear monitored and cared for. Others do not.

This project examines waste management in public spaces through the lens of environmental justice. The focus is not on landfills or large waste facilities, but on everyday infrastructure — parks, transit stops, sidewalks, and shared public areas throughout Peterborough. By documenting where litter and waste accumulation appear, the project aims to identify whether patterns of neglect emerge across certain areas.

PROJECT OVERVIEW

The purpose of this project is to create an Environmental Justice Map focused on waste conditions in surrounding public spaces throughout Peterborough, Ontario. The project investigates how litter, overflowing garbage bins, and inconsistent maintenance affect the quality and accessibility of shared urban environments.

Public spaces are often treated as background infrastructure although they shape daily life in direct ways. Parks are used for recreation, rest, and they are a fundamental pillar for many people's chilhood. Bus stops function as essential points of mobility for residents who rely on public transportation. Because these spaces are used constantly, their condition matters.

Additionally, the project will document visible waste-related issues across different areas of the city and compare how conditions vary between neighbourhoods. Observations will focus on the cleanliness of parks and transit areas, the availability and condition of public garbage bins, and signs of insufficient maintenance.

Rather than approaching litter as an isolated problem caused only by individual behaviour, the project considers how maintenance practices and public investment influence environmental conditions within shared spaces. In this sense, waste becomes more than a sanitation issue. It becomes part of a broader discussion about the quality of public life.

The completed map will serve as a visual record of these conditions and may help encourage discussion about how public spaces are maintained across Peterborough.

ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE AND COMMUNITY ACCESSIBILITY

Environmental justice refers to the fair treatment of communities in relation to environmental conditions and public resources. While the concept is often connected to large environmental hazards, it also applies to the everyday condition of public spaces.
In Peterborough, parks and transit areas are shared environments used by residents from many different backgrounds. Students wait at bus stops before school. Families spend time in local parks. Seniors rely on public transit to move through the city. These spaces are not secondary parts of urban life; they are part of the city's daily structure.
When garbage accumulates in these areas or maintenance becomes inconsistent, the effects extend beyond appearance. Public neglect changes how spaces are used and how comfortable people feel within them. Over time, repeated neglect can contribute to the perception that certain neighbourhoods receive less care or fewer resources than others.

AREAS OF FOCUS

For this project, the Community Access Map will focus on important public spaces and transportation infrastructure in Peterborough, Ontario.

1. Parks and Recreational Spaces
Public parks represent some of the most visible community spaces within Peterborough. These areas are intended to support recreation, relaxation, and social interaction — to everyone from the community — while contributing to environmental quality throughout the city. However, parks can also become frequent locations where litter accumulation, overflowing waste bins, and things like smoking are taken place.
This project will examine parks and playgrounds, to document the presence and severity of waste-related issues. Observations will focus on the condition of garbage, the cleanliness of shared spaces, and if waste is present, which type of waste is more frequently found.

2. Bus Stops and Transit Areas
Bus stops are essential elements of public infrastructure, particularly for residents who rely on public transportation for access to work, education, healthcare, and community services. Because these spaces experience frequent public use, they can also become sites where garbage accumulation by littering are especially noticeable.
The project will document waste conditions surrounding bus shelters, benches, sidewalks, and transit waiting areas throughout Peterborough. Special attention will be given to overflowing bins, litter accumulation, the availability of waste disposal options, and if differences in location between transit stops is an important factor.
Mapping these areas may help reveal whether waste-related conditions are more severe in particular sections of the city or along heavily used transit routes.

DATA COLLECTION METHODS

To create the Community Access Map, information will be collected through observations, photographs, and location tracking around Peterborough.

Community Observations
Different areas of Peterborough will be visited to observe the availability and condition of parks, public spaces, and transportation infrastructure. Observations may include downtown areas, residential neighbourhoods, transit routes, recreational areas, and community facilities.
During site visits, notes will be taken regarding accessibility, maintenance, availability of seating and sidewalks, public transit conditions, and the overall quality of community infrastructure. These observations will help provide a clearer understanding of how accessible and inclusive different areas of the city are.

Photo Documentation
Photographs will be collected for various reasons. These images will provide visual evidence of the condition and accessibility of community infrastructure across different neighbourhoods.
Photo documentation will also support comparisons between areas with stronger access to public resources and areas where infrastructure may be more limited.

Location Recording
Locations will be recorded using digital mapping tools such as Google Maps or GIS software. The final map will be shared digitally through a public board using Padlet so that it is accessible to community members and local organizations.

RESEARCH ON PUBLIC INFRASTRUCTURE IN PETERBOROUGH

Additional research will be conducted on Peterborough's public transportation system and community infrastructure. This research may include:

- Peterborough Transit routes and schedules
- City park and recreation information

Understanding how these systems operate can help explain differences in access to transportation and public spaces across neighbourhoods.

DATA ORGANIZATION

All collected information will be organized in a spreadsheet containing:

- Location name
- Type of community resource
- Accessibility observations
- Date observed
- Notes and descriptions
- Photo references

This organized data will later be used to create the final Community Access Map.

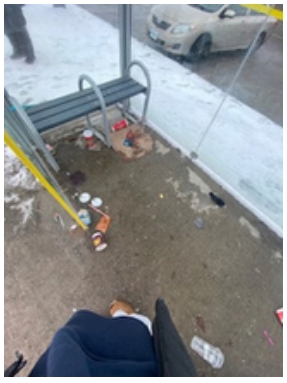
DATA ORGANIZATION

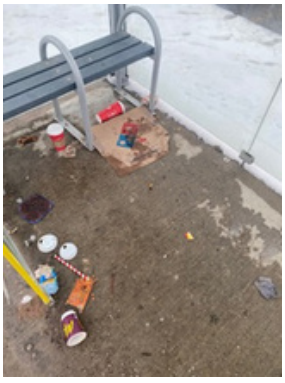
The following locations became the primary focus of the Environmental Justice Map because they reflected recurring waste-related issues within shared public spaces. Rather than isolated incidents, both locations showed patterns that repeated over time, identifying them as highlighted hotspots where environmental neglect had become usual within everyday urban environments. Not to say, there are many other spots that experience the same events, but this article is going to go deeper into these two.

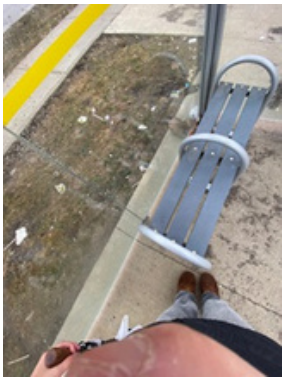
1. Bus Stop (Monaghan/Lansdowne)
One of the most significant observation sites was the bus stop located near Lansdowne Place, beside the Tim Hortons and other food and entertainment spots. The location includes a covered bus shelter and receives frequent pedestrian traffic throughout the day due to its proximity to shopping areas, restaurants, and transit routes.
Over multiple visits and periods of observation, litter accumulation remained a consistent issue at the site. While maintenance was occasionally visible, the condition of the area rarely stayed clean for long. Garbage would repeatedly return within short periods of time, creating the impression of a space caught in a cycle of temporary cleaning followed by rapid decline.
The most common forms of waste observed included coffee cups, food containers, wrappers, and napkins. Much of the litter appeared connected to nearby commercial activity. Because the bus stop is located close to fast food businesses, restaurants, and the shopping centre, people frequently pass through the area carrying disposable packaging and drinks. Some waste appeared to come directly from littering, as

containers that seemed new were the main type of waste. Another recurring issue involved the absence of nearby garbage bins directly around the shelter area. As a result, waste often accumulated on the ground itself, particularly around benches, corners of the shelter, and sidewalk edges. During some observations, unpleasant odours were also noticeable.

What made the location important for the project was not simply that it became dirty, but that the pattern remained relatively unchanged across different observation periods. The issue appeared persistent rather than temporary. Even when maintenance occurred, the conditions repeatedly returned, suggesting that the problem may relate not only to individual behaviour, but also to infrastructure design, transit activity, nearby commercial concentration, and the frequency of public maintenance.







2. GWIN Community Cleanup Project

A second major component of the project focused on direct community action through GWIN, the Global Waste Intelligence Network. Developed through the CLF Climate Leaders Fellowship, GWIN was created as a project dedicated to collecting environmental data and transforming local observations into environmental action.

As part of the initiative, a community cleanup event was organized in a public park (King Edward Park). The cleanup focused on documenting the types of waste found within the park while also examining how litter accumulates within public recreational spaces.

Within approximately one hour, participants collected around two kilograms of waste from the area. One of the most concerning findings involved cigarette waste. Based on collected weight estimates, roughly 800 cigarette remains were removed from the park despite smoking being prohibited in public parks. The volume of cigarette litter suggested that smoking within the area was not occasional, but frequent and ongoing.

The cleanup also revealed a mixture of waste types. Some debris consisted of ripped packaging, torn plastic, and lightweight fragments scattered throughout grassy areas and sidewalks. These materials appeared likely to have travelled through wind dispersal, possibly originating from nearby residential garbage or improperly secured waste. Other items, however, appeared intentionally discarded. Full food containers, drink cups, and larger waste items suggested direct littering within the park itself. Other concerning items found were a razor, toothbrush, and spoon, which could indicate that those came from someone's discarded personal belongings or from unmanaged waste sources.

The contrast between these forms of waste became important during analysis. Some litter reflected environmental movement, while other waste reflected direct human behaviour within the public space. Together, both contributed to the gradual deterioration of the park environment.

The cleanup event reinforced one of the central ideas behind the Environmental Justice Map: public spaces experience environmental pressure from multiple directions at once. Neglect is rarely caused by a single factor. Instead, it develops through repeated small actions, inconsistent maintenance, infrastructure limitations, and patterns of public behaviour that slowly change the condition of shared environments.

Beyond waste collection itself, the GWIN project emphasized the importance of environmental observation as a form of community engagement.

Day 1: Waste Intelligence Lab

Day 2: Community Clean Up

Day 3: Waste Sorting, Analysis, and Data Collection