The fight against Google's sociopath Yuppie smart city

Bianca Wylie works on her computer at a public library in Toronto. July 21, 2018. (Nick Kozak for The WorldPost)

By Brian Barth

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TORONTO — Behind a cloak of shrubbery in a gritty Toronto neighborhood lies a brick duplex, the home of Bianca Wylie, a 39-year-old mother of two on a mission to upend big tech's latest pet project: "smart" cities. In a living room office overflowing with books and baby toys, Wylie settles into an armchair and unspools the story of how she found herself up against the mother of all Internet companies.

In October 2017, Sidewalk Labs, a Google-affiliated company looking to make urban life more streamlined, economical and green by infusing cities with sensors and data analytics, announced plans to build the world's first neighborhood "from the Internet up" on 12 acres of the Toronto waterfront, an area known as Quayside. Sidewalk aims to, for example, build an "advanced microgrid" to power electric cars, design "mixed-use" spaces to bring down housing costs, employ "sensor-enabled waste separation" to aid recycling and use data to improve public services.

The company's long-term vision is to expand to the adjacent Port Lands, a valuable 800-acre tract of industrial waterfront. And from there, as Prime Minister Justin Trudeau said at a press conference to unveil the project, to "other parts of Canada and around the world." Quayside will be "a testbed for new technologies," Trudeau declared in rousing tones. "Technologies that will help us build smarter, greener, more inclusive cities." The media was then treated to a series of utopic renderings of a futuristic neighborhood featuring driverless buses, green-roofed condos and carefree children
running barefoot amid butterflies.

Wylie, however, has zero tolerance for smart city PR-speak. "The smart city industry is a Trojan horse for technology companies," she told The WorldPost. "They come in under the guise of environmentalism and improving quality of life, but they're here for money."