

# **TORONTO** STAFF REPORT

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March 10, 2003

To: Toronto East York Community Council

From: Director, Community Planning, South District

Subject: St. James Town Community Improvement Plan  
File No. 702010  
Toronto Centre - Rosedale, Ward 28

Purpose:

To advise Council of the status of the St. James Town 2000 Community Action Plan, present the “St. James Town Open Space Design and Implementation Plan,” recommend designation of a community improvement project area including St. James Town and North St. James Town, recommend civic improvements to Bleecker Street, and repeal the existing Community Improvement Plan for St. James Town.

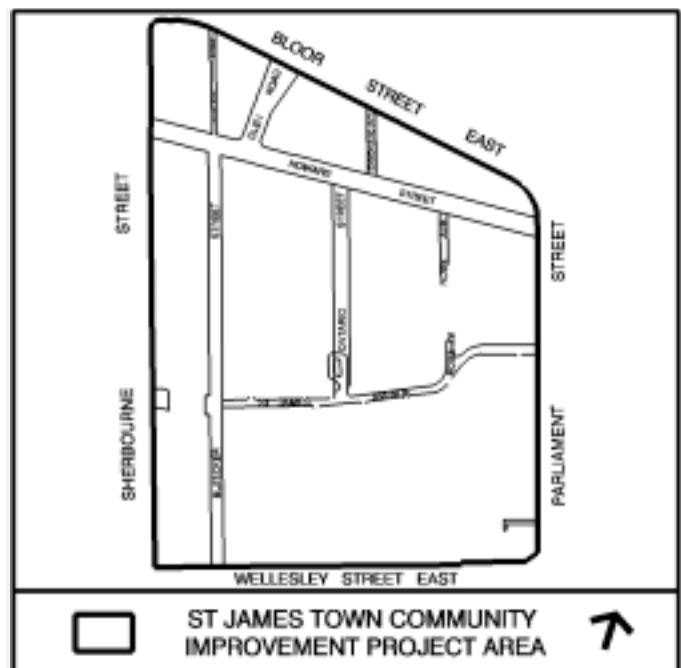
Financial Implications and Impact Statement:

There are no financial implications resulting from the adoption of this report.

Recommendations:

It is recommended that Council:

- (1) adopt a by-law designating the lands bounded by Bloor Street East, Parliament Street, Wellesley Street East, and Sherbourne Street as a Community Improvement Project Area substantially in accordance with the draft by-law attached to this report;
- (2) authorize the City Solicitor to make such stylistic and technical changes to the draft By-law as may be required;



- (3) request the Commissioner of Urban Development Services, in consultation with appropriate City staff, to prepare a Community Improvement Plan for this Community Improvement Project Area;
- (4) repeal By-Law No. 598-89, and thereby repeal the St. James Town Community Improvement Plan;
- (5) receive the “St. James Town Open Space Design and Implementation Plan: Final Report,” prepared by Architects Alliance;
- (6) authorize the Commissioners of Urban Development Services and Works and Emergency Services to prepare a design for streetscape improvements to Bleeker Street between Wellesley Street East and Howard Street and to include the improvements in the 2004 Capital Budget request; and
- (7) authorize the appropriate staff to give effect thereto.

Background:

St. James Town is the neighbourhood bounded by Parliament Street on the east, Wellesley Street on the south, Sherbourne Street on the west, and Howard Street on the north. It consists primarily of 18 high-rise apartment buildings constructed approximately 40 years ago. The neighbourhood has a long history of revitalization initiatives generally aimed at achieving physical improvements and improved social service provision.

An existing community improvement plan for St. James Town was approved by Council on September 9, 1989 through By-Law No. 598-89. The existing plan contains a number of elements to achieve improvement to open space in the neighbourhood, with funding through the Ontario Neighbourhood Improvement Program. While some of the improvements have been implemented, including lighting of public spaces and improvements to the community space in front of Rose Avenue School, others have not. The ONIP program is no longer in existence and cannot provide funding to continue the improvements.

In 1997 Council endorsed a report entitled “St. James Town 2000: Community Action Plan”, prepared by the St. James Town Interdepartmental Staff Committee, which outlined four objectives, including the implementation of a community greening strategy that would result in an improved use of existing open spaces and public parklands. At the same time, Council authorized development of an implementation plan for a Parks and Open Space Improvement Strategy.

In conjunction with the Community Action Plan, Architects Alliance, a local architectural and planning firm, was engaged to prepare the “St. James Town Open Space Design and Implementation Plan” report, which was completed in 2002. A copy of the report is on file with the City Clerk and available for public review. It recommends a community improvement plan for the area as a vehicle to implement open space improvements for the area.

Comments:

St. James Town Neighbourhood

St. James Town is a neighbourhood consisting primarily of 18 high-rise residential apartment buildings built between 1946 and 1961. The neighbourhood has evolved to primarily house families, including many recent immigrants. The 2001 census reported that the St. James Town census tract is home to 16,225 residents housed in about 7000 dwelling units in 18 high-rise apartment buildings. Many residents have low incomes and the neighbourhood has historically been underserved with respect to social and community services.

St. James Town suffers from a shortage of well-defined sidewalks, streets and public space and residents do not have sufficient access to open space and parks. Buildings are not oriented in a way that clearly signifies ownership and purpose of spaces around them. Much of the privately-owned space is not consolidated, and is separated by fences or other physical barriers delineating property lines. Little of the space that does exist is suitable for active recreational purposes. Much of the open space, both streets and landscaping, sits on top of underground parking garages, limiting opportunities for landscaping. Streets in the interior of the neighbourhood are privately owned and often not maintained to standards required for public property.

St. James Town Action Plan

At its meeting of September 22, 1997 Council endorsed the St. James Town 2000: Community Action Plan, prepared by the St. James Town Community Facilities Working Committee. The Action Plan was prepared by City Planning staff with input from both Staff and Resident Committees. The plan identified four key strategic actions to revitalize the St. James Town neighbourhood and to address community services deficiencies:

- (1) development of a multi-service community facility within St. James Town;
- (2) creation of improved parklands and open spaces within St. James Town;
- (3) exploration of planning mechanisms to restrict residential development in and around St. James Town until there are sufficient community services and facilities; and
- (4) support for initiatives designed to preserve the high-rise rental stock in St. James Town.

An integrated planning approach, including service coordination and partnerships with community stakeholders, has been a successful model to implement the Action Plan. Implementation is on-going. Development of a multi-service community facility within St. James Town is under construction at 495 Sherbourne Street. The project will include a community and recreation centre, a public library, and a day-care. Opportunities to create improved parklands, more typical public streets and open space have been explored in the Architects Alliance report and is the subject of the community improvement project area recommended below.

## Open Space Design and Implementation Plan

As noted above, Architects Alliance was engaged by the City to prepare an Open Space Design and Implementation Plan, in order to identify opportunities for improved parklands and open space in St. James Town. A copy of the report has been filed with the City Clerk for public review.

The report contains analysis of the design and use of St. James Town open space and provides a concept for defining and improving open space in the area. Main elements proposed by the plan include:

- (a) re-establishing public ownership over the private roads in St. James Town;
- (b) re-alignment of St. James Avenue;
- (c) creation of a new park in the eastern side of St. James Town;
- (d) landscaping and street design improvements to Bleecker Street, St. James Avenue, Rose Avenue, and Ontario Street; and
- (e) permission for additional development to be strategically sited to better define the neighbourhood's open space.

Many of these items require a further technical review to determine whether they are practical and to confirm their desirability. The Open Space Design and Implementation Plan recommends a Community Improvement Plan as a tool to achieve physical improvements. The Community Improvement Plan recommended below will incorporate more detailed study and design in preparation of a final community improvement plan, including further technical review with representatives from Works and Emergency Services, Parks and Recreation, City Planning, and the Toronto Community Housing Corporation.

## Community Improvement Project Area

Subsection 28(2) of the Planning Act provides Council with the ability to designate an area of the municipality as a Community Improvement Project Area. Once it has designated a project area, Council may provide for the preparation of a Community Improvement Plan, which permits Council to implement community initiatives that would not otherwise be permissible.

As a prerequisite for a Community Improvement Project Area, the Official Plan must contain provisions respecting community improvements. These provisions are contained in Sections 15.2 and 15.3 of the former City of Toronto Official Plan. The new Official Plan also contains the required provisions -- policy 5.2.2.2 states that Community Improvement Project Areas will be identified for areas exhibiting deficient or deteriorated public infrastructure and/or amenity, physical decline in local building stock, and declining social, environmental and/or economic conditions. (Council adopted the new Official Plan for the City of Toronto at its meeting of November 26, 27, and 28, 2002. It will come into force subject to approval by the Minister of Municipal Affairs and resolution of any appeals.)

St. James Town is an appropriate candidate for designation as a Community Improvement Project Area. Attachment 1 of this report shows the proposed boundaries of the project area:

Bloor Street East, Parliament Street, Wellesley Street East, and Sherbourne Street. The proposed community improvement project area includes St. James Town and North St. James Town.

North St. James Town is the large triangular block immediately to the north of St. James Town and south of Bloor Street East. The area contains primarily residential uses, including a number of rooming houses. The primary access to North St. James Town is Howard Street, which is traditionally the northern boundary of St. James Town. Vacant land in North St. James Town has historically been identified as possible locations for City-owned parkland to serve both the North St. James Town and St. James Town communities.

The new project area will include both neighbourhoods in order to acknowledge that North St. James Town is physically connected to St. James Town and to take an integrated approach to community improvement in the two areas.

#### Bleecker Street Improvements

Despite the anticipated community improvement study, physical improvements to Bleecker Street could proceed outside of the context of an approved community improvement plan, as such improvements would generally be located within the existing public right-of-way. The Open Space Design and Implementation Plan recommends urban design improvements to Bleecker Street between Wellesley Street East and Howard Street as part of its concept for Phase 1.

There is rationale to proceed with Bleecker Street improvements ahead of a final approved community improvement plan. Bleecker Street is currently scheduled for resurfacing in 2004, which may be an opportunity to cost-efficiently construct improvements. Bleecker Street is also adjacent to the community centre currently under construction, which is slated for a 2004 opening -- construction of street improvements could be coordinated with the centre's final landscape plan. Unlike most roadways in St. James Town, Bleecker Street has remained under public ownership, and therefore presents fewer challenges to achieve desired improvements. For these reasons, staff recommend that Council authorize Urban Development Services and Works and Emergency Services to prepare a plan for streetscape improvements to Bleecker Street and include the improvements in their 2004 capital budget request.

#### Existing Community Improvement Plan

On September 7, 1989, City Council passed By-law No. 598-89, adopting a Community Improvement Plan for St. James Town. The plan was a requirement of provincial funding for neighbourhood improvements awarded to the City under the Ontario Neighbourhood Improvement Program (ONIP). The plan consists of five components to achieve physical improvements in the neighbourhood:

- (a) lighting of public spaces and common outdoor areas;
- (b) improvements to the community space in front of Rose Avenue School;
- (c) re-establishment of the former St. James Avenue as a public highway;
- (d) re-establishment of Ontario Street as a public highway; and

- (e) establishment of Ontario Street and Rose Avenue as publicly-owned pedestrian walkways.

ONIP monies, with matching funds from the City and Metropolitan Toronto, were expended to complete the lighting of public spaces and improvements to the space in front of the Rose Avenue School. The three projects involving public ownership of streets were not completed, largely due to technical issues around City-ownership of streets that are located on top of underground parking structures. The ONIP funding for St. James Town improvements expired in 1992.

It is anticipated that a new Community Improvement Plan will expand upon some elements of the existing plan, and include a wider range of strategies to define and improve publicly accessible open space in the neighbourhood. Given that the existing plan is now thirteen years old and only partially implemented, the ONIP program no longer exists, and a new plan is anticipated, staff recommend that the existing Community Improvement Plan be repealed.

Conclusions:

Staff recommend the establishment of a new Community Improvement Project Area to include St. James Town and North St. James Town. The project area is in anticipation of a new community improvement plan for the area. Establishment of a project area is consistent with other initiatives recently undertaken by the City in St. James Town in recent years. The “St. James Town Open Space Design and Implementation Plan” prepared by Architect’s Alliance will form the basis for discussions around a new CIP. Staff also recommend that Council endorse the principle of civic improvements to Bleecker Street.

It is anticipated that the new Community Improvement Plan will consist of some outstanding elements of St. James Town’s existing Community Improvement Plan, elements based on the Open Space Design and Implementation Plan, and elements determined in consultation with the community.

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List of Attachments:

Attachment 1: St. James Town Community Improvement Project Area

Attachment 2: Draft By-Law

**Attachment 2**

**CITY OF TORONTO**

Bill No.

**BY-LAW No. - 2003**

**To designate certain lands in the St. James Town Area as  
a Community Improvement Project Area.**

WHEREAS subsection 28(2) of the *Planning Act* provides that the council of a municipality which has an Official Plan containing provisions relating to community improvement, may by by-law designate the whole or any part of an area covered by such an Official Plan as a Community Improvement Project Area;

AND WHEREAS the Official Plan of the former City of Toronto contains provisions relating to community improvement which cover lands outlined by heavy lines on Map 1 attached to and forming part of this By-law;

AND WHEREAS the Council of the City of Toronto has authorized the designation of certain lands hereinafter described as a Community Improvement Project Area which is to be known as the St. James Town Community Improvement Project Area;

The Council of the City of Toronto HEREBY ENACTS as follows:

1. The area outlined by heavy lines shown on Map 1 attached to and forming part of this By-law is designated as a Community Improvement Project Area within the meaning of Section 28 of the *Planning Act*.

ENACTED AND PASSED this            day of April, A.D. 2003.

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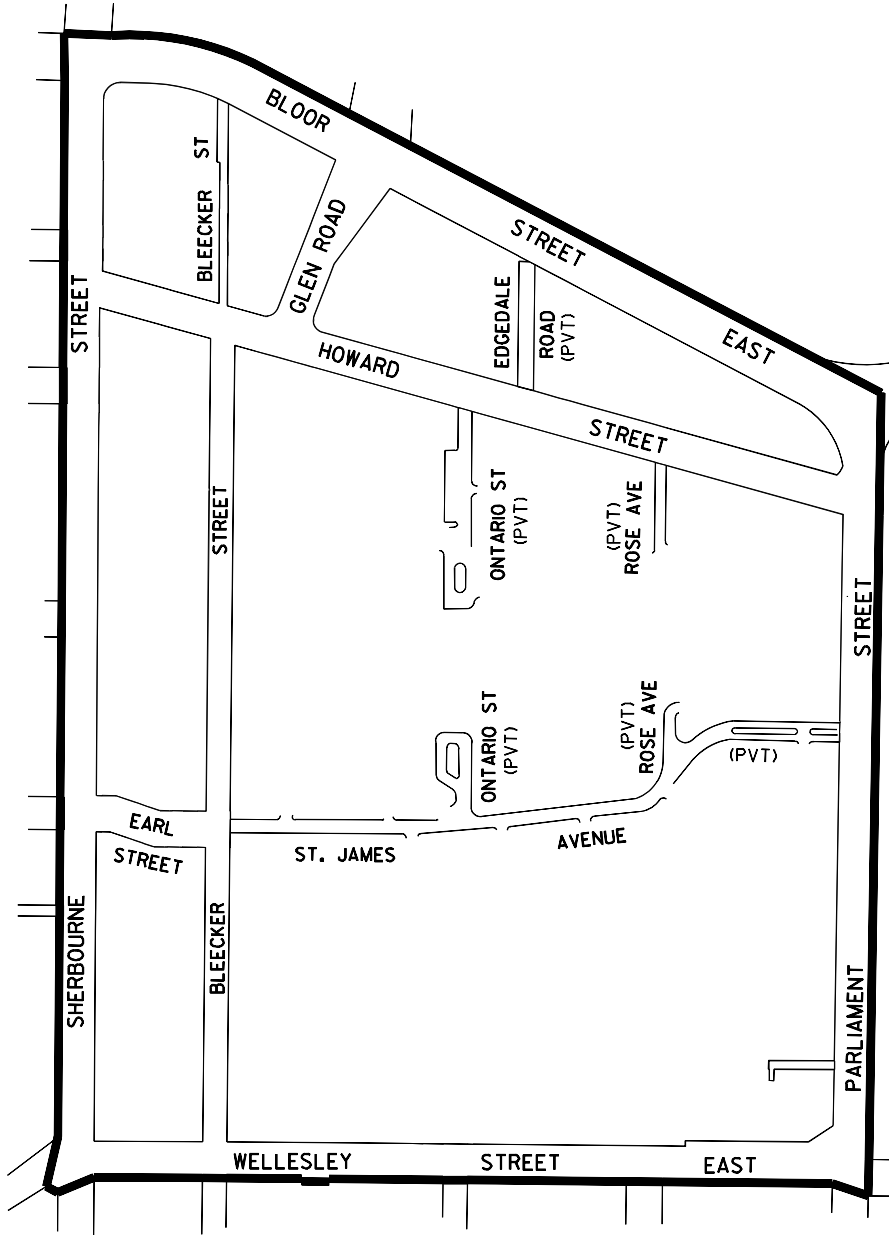
Mayor

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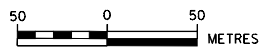
City Clerk



# MAP 1



 ST. JAMES TOWN COMMUNITY IMPROVEMENT PROJECT AREA



WORKS AND EMERGENCY SERVICES  
SURVEY AND MAPPING SERVICES  
TORONTO MARCH, 2003  
BLO3/CIPSTJ.DGN  
FILE: W47-CIP1  
MAP No. 51H-22 DRAWN: WS