

Coordinated Street Furniture Program: Funding for Tourist Information Component

Date:	February 26, 2008
To:	Budget Committee
From:	Duncan H. Ross, Executive Director, Tourism Section Economic Development, Culture & Tourism Division
Wards:	All
Reference Number:	

SUMMARY

This report recommends that the 2008 Operating Budget include the transfer of \$300,000 from the “public realm reserve fund” to the 2008 Recommended Operating Budget for Economic Development Culture and Tourism to support the development of the content for the 120 info pillars which are planned as part of the coordinated street furniture program.

The installation of the pillars and the content they will deliver will partially address a long articulated need for improved information systems in Toronto for visitors. The need to improve tourist information systems is among the priority recommendations to emerge from the recently completed industry-led “Premier Ranked Tourist Destination” project scheduled to come before the Economic Development Committee in April 2008. Tourism information development also supports the recommendations of “The Prosperity Agenda”.

This opportunity to improve the City’s delivery of tourism and wayfinding information services to pedestrians comes about as a result of the “Coordinated Street Furniture Program”. The capital infrastructure and maintenance requirements of the Program are included within the terms of the Agreement between the City and Astral Media. This report deals only with the information content to be provided by the pillars.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. That the Economic Development Culture and Tourism 2008 Operating Budget be increased by \$0.300 million gross, zero net, funded by \$0.300 million from the Public Realm Reserve Fund, to develop the tourist information system and wayfinding content of the info pillar component of the Co-ordinated Street Furniture Program; and
2. The General Manager of Economic Development Culture and Tourism report to Budget Committee by the Summer of 2008 on the multi-year plan and associated funding required to develop and sustain the information content system to provide tourist information and wayfinding signage for the Information pillar element of the Coordinated Street Furniture Program.

Financial Impact

The Economic Development Culture and Tourism 2008 Recommended Operating Budget would be increased by \$0.300 million gross and \$0 net by these recommendations.

At its meeting on December 11, 12 and 13, 2007, Council adopted report entitled, “Coordinated Street Furniture Program – Revenues; and Establishment of a New ‘Public Realm’ Reserve Fund” and referred the following recommendation to the 2008 Operating Budget process -- “that the development and maintenance of tourist information and wayfinding signage strategies in connection with the info pillar element of the Street Furniture Program receive up to \$300,000 in 2008 from the Public Realm Reserve Fund” subject to the Executive Director, Tourism, submitting a business case.

This report recommends that the \$300,000 allocated for 2008 be used for contracted services to deliver the roll-out of the interim solution for the information system in 2008 (estimated \$5,000), and to develop the full information system that will be implemented in 2009 (estimated \$295,000).

Once consultations with other City divisions and Astral Media concerning the details of this project is completed in the first half of 2008, a further report to Budget Committee will provide a recommended approach to the roll-out and sustainment of the tourist information and wayfinding signage system and the requirements for 2009 and 2010 funding from the Public Realm Reserve Fund.

DECISION HISTORY

At its meeting on December 11, 12 and 13, 2007, City Council adopted the Coordinated Street Furniture Program-Revenues report establishing a discretionary reserve fund called the “Public Realm Reserve Fund” to receive revenues from the street furniture contract. It referred the recommendation “that the development and maintenance of tourist information and wayfinding signage strategies in connection with the info pillar element of the Street Furniture Program receive up to \$300,000 in 2008 from the Public Realm

Reserve Fund” subject to the Executive Director, Tourism, submitting a business case, to the 2008 Operating Budget process.

<http://www.toronto.ca/legdocs/mmis/2007/ex/bgrd/backgroundfile-8835.pdf>

ISSUE BACKGROUND

City Council at its meeting of May 23, 24 and 25, 2007, considered the matter entitled “Coordinated Street Furniture Program – Results of Request for Proposals 9103-06-7316 (Executive Committee Item EX8.8). Council accepted the proposal by Astral Media to develop and install a coordinated system of street furniture elements throughout the city, the cost to be paid for by advertising revenue.

One of the elements of the Coordinated Street Furniture Program will be Information Pillars which will provide maps of the surrounding area, orientation information and interactive screens and LED message panels including information about the City of Toronto, its attractions and special events at 120 locations throughout the City. The installation of the pillars is to take place during the second half of 2008 and 2009.

The Coordinated Street Furniture Program will be managed by the newly created Public Realm Office within Transportation Services. The City’s contract with Astral Media assigns responsibility for the capital maintenance of the infrastructure, including technological updates, to Astral Media. Responsibility for the tourism-oriented information content of the pillars rests with EDCT-Tourism.

At its meeting on December 11, 12 and 13, 2007, City Council approved the Coordinated Street Furniture Program-Revenues Report, including the referral of recommendation 11b. “that the development and maintenance of tourist information and wayfinding signage strategies in connection with the info pillar element of the Street Furniture Program receive up to \$300,000 in 2008 from the Public Realm Reserve Fund” subject to the Executive Director, Tourism, submitting a business case, to the 2008 Operating Budget process.

The report included the proposal that \$817,000 from the Public Realm Reserve Fund be allocated to the info pillars and way finding over 3 three years: \$300,000 in 2008, \$307,000 in 2009 and \$210,000 in 2010.

COMMENTS

Need for Enhanced Tourist Information

Repeated research and studies have shown that one of Toronto’s weaknesses as a tourist destination is the inadequate information we provide to visitors about how to get around in the city and find things to see and do. Addressing this weakness is among the recommendations to emerge from the recently completed industry-led “Premier Ranked Tourist Destination” project scheduled to come before the Economic Development

Committee in April 2008. It also supports the recommendations of the recently approved Prosperity Agenda.

The 120 info pillars will partially address the public's need for direction and information as they move throughout the city. Pedestrians walking along the sidewalk will be able to easily see large scale maps of the surrounding area, and use the interactive screens leading them to key information of interest to visitors. LED panels will communicate key messages about the city. The public also will be able to purchase pocket sized city maps from map dispensers located on each pillar.

Proposed Service Delivery

The most substantive area requiring development in 2008 is the content that will be accessed by the interactive screens to be included on the pillars. Considerable work by experts in information technology and the design of user-friendly electronic interfaces will be required to develop the interactive system. The design of the interfaces will be coordinated with the current Parkland Pillar project to provide a consistent look and feel for the two information projects as they both use information pillars to deliver the content.

The desired final product is an easy-to-use screen and menu options that will quickly guide the public to the information of interest to each person. The technology behind the screens and determination of such questions as whether or not all screens will provide the same information or be tailored to location, whether or not they will be web-enabled or operated by self-contained computers, etc. is being researched by Astral Media for discussion with City staff. These discussions commenced in February 2008.

Tourism Staff in EDCT will undertake responsibility for the development and maintenance of tourist information content of the pillars. While doing so fits within the Tourism mandate and staff has expertise in this area, current resources are not sufficient to undertake a project of the required scope.

The November 12, 2007 report "Coordinated Street Furniture Program-Revenues" from the Deputy City Manager, Cluster B, recommended the transfer of \$300,000 from the Public Realm Reserve Fund to the 2008 Recommended Operating Budget for EDCT in order to enable EDCT-Tourism to undertake this project.

The 2008 work plan has two basic components. In the short term, the focus will be on rolling out the 60 information pillars to be installed in summer 2008. The locations of the pillars need to be finalized, input provided to the maps being developed by Astral Media and their subcontractors, and a simple but useful interactive tool developed serving as an interim solution until the complete information content system is developed and implemented in 2009. Due to the short timeframe within which this work needs to be completed, additional services will be contracted to supplement existing staff at an estimated cost of approximately \$5,000.

The second component of the 2008 work plan is the development of the complete information content system that will ultimately be delivered from the Info Pillars. The services of information system specialists will be retained to research options and best practices in consultation with City staff and Astral Media, and recommend a solution,

implementation plan and long term information content maintenance plan. Contracted services also will be responsible for populating the system with the information content. The estimated cost of this work is \$295,000. A cross-divisional project team including staff from Web Services, IT, Transportation Services, Access Toronto and the 311 project will be formed to provide input to the project.

In 2009, the sixty remaining Info Pillars will be installed and the full information system implemented for all of the 120 pillars, replacing the interim information interface rolled out within the first phase of the project. The funding requirements for 2009 and 2010 will be included in a subsequent report from The General Manager of Economic Development Culture and Tourism, by the Summer of 2008 on the recommended information content system and sustainable multi-year implementation plan and the resources required for the Tourist information and wayfinding signage for the Information pillars in future years.

In 2009, and throughout the twenty year life of the City's contract with Astral Media, the information content on the pillars must be kept current and relevant to the public by City staff. It is anticipated that funding requirements to do so will be addressed from the Public Realm Reserve Fund through allocations originally identified for 2008 - 2010. As noted above, the ongoing information content maintenance plan will be developed in the 2008 work plan. The City's contract with Astral Media assigns responsibility for the capital maintenance of the infrastructure, including technological updates, to Astral Media.

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SIGNATURE

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