



STAFF REPORT ACTION REQUIRED

Authorization to Extend the Commercial Façade Improvement Program

Date:	December 7, 2009
To:	Planning & Growth Management Committee
From:	Chief Planner and Executive Director, City Planning Division
Wards:	Wards 1, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 25, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32, 35, 41, 42
Reference Number:	Pg10001

SUMMARY

This report seeks authority to prepare a by-law to adopt a Community Improvement Plan (CIP) to extend the Commercial Façade Improvement Program grants to property owners within new Business Improvement Areas once the Business Improvement Area (BIA) becomes eligible and other eligibility requirements have been met.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Chief Planner and Executive Director, City Planning Division recommends that:

- (1) Planning and Growth Management Committee approve the preparation of a Community Improvement Plan to extend the Commercial Façade Improvement Program to 20 new Business Improvement Areas;
- (2) Notice for the public meeting under the *Planning Act* be given in accordance with the regulations under the *Planning Act* with the public meeting targeted for Spring 2010;
- (3) This report be forwarded to the Economic Development Committee for information; and,
- (4) The appropriate City officials be authorized and directed to take the necessary actions to give effect thereto.

Financial Impact

There are no financial implications contained in this report.

DECISION HISTORY

At its meeting of September 28, 29, and 30, 2005, Council approved the Commercial Façade Improvement Program guidelines and implementation schedule and directed that the necessary documentation and reports be brought forward to initiate a process leading to designation of Community Improvement Project Areas that coincide with the City's then existing BIAs (Clause 8, Economic Development Committee Report 7).

<http://www.toronto.ca/legdocs/2005/agendas/council/cc050928/cofa.pdf>

At its meeting of January 31, February 1 and 2, 2006, City Council adopted the necessary by-laws to designate the 44 BIAs in existence at the time as Community Improvement Project Areas and to adopt the required Commercial Façade Improvement Program related Community Improvement Plans (CIPs) (Clause 1, Planning and Transportation Committee Report 1).

<http://www.toronto.ca/legdocs/2006/agendas/council/cc060131/cofa.pdf>

On April 23 and 24, 2007, Council considered Item PG3.1 and adopted by-laws designating six (6) new Community Improvement Project Areas and adopting 6 CIPs to recognize new BIAs that had been formed and become eligible since 2006. Council also authorized amendments to certain Commercial Façade Improvement Program CIPs to recognize changes to boundaries of five (5) existing BIAs.

<http://www.toronto.ca/legdocs/mmis/2007/cc/decisions/2007-04-23-cc07-dd.pdf>

At its meeting of May 26 and 27, 2008, City Council considered Item PG15.2 and adopted By-law 516-2008, thereby designating the entire City of Toronto as a Community Improvement Project Area, with the exception of very limited portions of the Toronto Waterfront and the South of Eastern Employment District.

<http://www.toronto.ca/legdocs/mmis/2008/cc/decisions/2008-05-26-cc21-dd.pdf>

ISSUE BACKGROUND

The Commercial Façade Improvement Program (CFIP) was first introduced in the former City of Toronto in conjunction with the Business Improvement Area Program. After amalgamation and until 2005 the CFIP was also used to support the Employment Revitalization Program. Since 2005 the CFIP has been available exclusively to property owners within BIAs that have existed for at least five years.

COMMENTS

Program Purpose and Details

Two of City Council's top priorities are the improvement of the City's business climate and making Toronto a clean and beautiful city. BIAs are essential contributors in both endeavours.

There are 70 BIAs in the City of Toronto. Most BIAs are located in older main street commercial areas. BIAs are an integral part of the economic and social well-being of the communities in which they are located. They provide shopping and other services within close walking distance, are focal points for neighbourhood activity, and offer opportunities for local entrepreneurship and employment. BIAs contribute approximately \$350 million in tax revenue to the City each year and employ over 150,000 people.

Many BIAs find competition from big-box and internet retailing and a general decline in building stock an increasing challenge. These factors threaten the longer term economic vitality and viability of the City's main street retail areas. It is important from a planning and economic development point of view to ensure vital and viable retail strips in the City as they contribute to a healthy tax base, provide local entrepreneurship and employment opportunities, and ensure that less mobile portions of the population have access to near-by shopping and other services. Local "walk-to" retail also increases opportunities for pedestrian- and bike-based shopping and reduces GHG emissions.

The Commercial Façade Improvement Program is a proven, cost-effective way to improve the retail building stock by stimulating investment by local business. The Program complements the City's Capital Cost Share Program, which provides matching funding for streetscape improvements in BIAs. Together these two programs have a significant impact on the cleanliness and attractiveness of local shopping areas, a key factor in the economic vitality and viability of these areas.

Even in some of the City's more vibrant BIAs, a Commercial Façade Improvement Program can be a useful tool to maintain the level of investment necessary to ensure continued success. Within these areas, the program can be a catalyst by attracting new businesses and improving the visual attractiveness and architectural quality of the area.

The Commercial Façade Improvement Program provides grants to commercial property owners and tenants within eligible BIAs to improve the appearance of their building façade. Under the Program, the City provides grants of fifty percent of eligible construction costs to a maximum of \$10,000 for mid-block properties and \$12,500 for corner properties. Prospective grant applicants must meet the application criteria approved by Council. Applications are considered and approved on a 'first come, first serve' basis up to a predetermined deadline date.

Planning Requirements

Façade Improvement grants are permitted under the *City of Toronto Act, 2006* only within areas designated as Community Improvement Project Areas and only if a CIP containing relevant policies has been adopted and approved, pursuant to Section 28 of the *Planning Act*.

The Planning Act defines a Community Improvement Project Area as:

“a municipality or an area within a municipality, the community improvement of which, in the opinion of the council, is desirable because of age, dilapidation, overcrowding, faulty arrangement, unsuitability of buildings or for any other environment, social or community economic development reason”.

The Official Plan for the City of Toronto (at Section 5.2.2) states that “Community Improvement Project Areas will be designated by by-law and Community Improvement Plans will be prepared to promote the maintenance, rehabilitation, revitalization and/or conservation of selected lands, buildings, and communities facing challenges of transition, deficiency or deterioration or for any other environmental, social or community economic development reason.

The Official Plan also states that CIPs will be prepared to provide direction regarding municipal investment to complement projects of a Business Improvement Area and local economic growth.

The areas that coincide with the BIAs are considered appropriate to implement initiatives to enhance the visual attractiveness, architectural character and general business climate of local shopping areas by encouraging redesign, renovation and restoration of commercial facades.

It is not necessary to designate individual Community Improvement Project Areas for each BIA, because they were included in the area designated by By-law 516-2008. The proposed Commercial Façade Improvement Program CIP will, however, contain maps showing the BIAs to which the CIP applies.

Implementation

Of the 70 existing BIAs, 50 have applicable Commercial Façade Improvement Program CIPs. The 20 new BIAs created in recent years do not yet have applicable CIPs.

The proposed CIP will enable properties within the new BIAs to benefit from the grants as soon as all eligibility requirements have been met. For example, among other requirements, a property within a BIA will only become eligible for the grants if the BIA has been in existence for five years. The proposed eligibility requirements will mirror those of the existing Commercial Façade Improvement Program CIPs.

CONTACT

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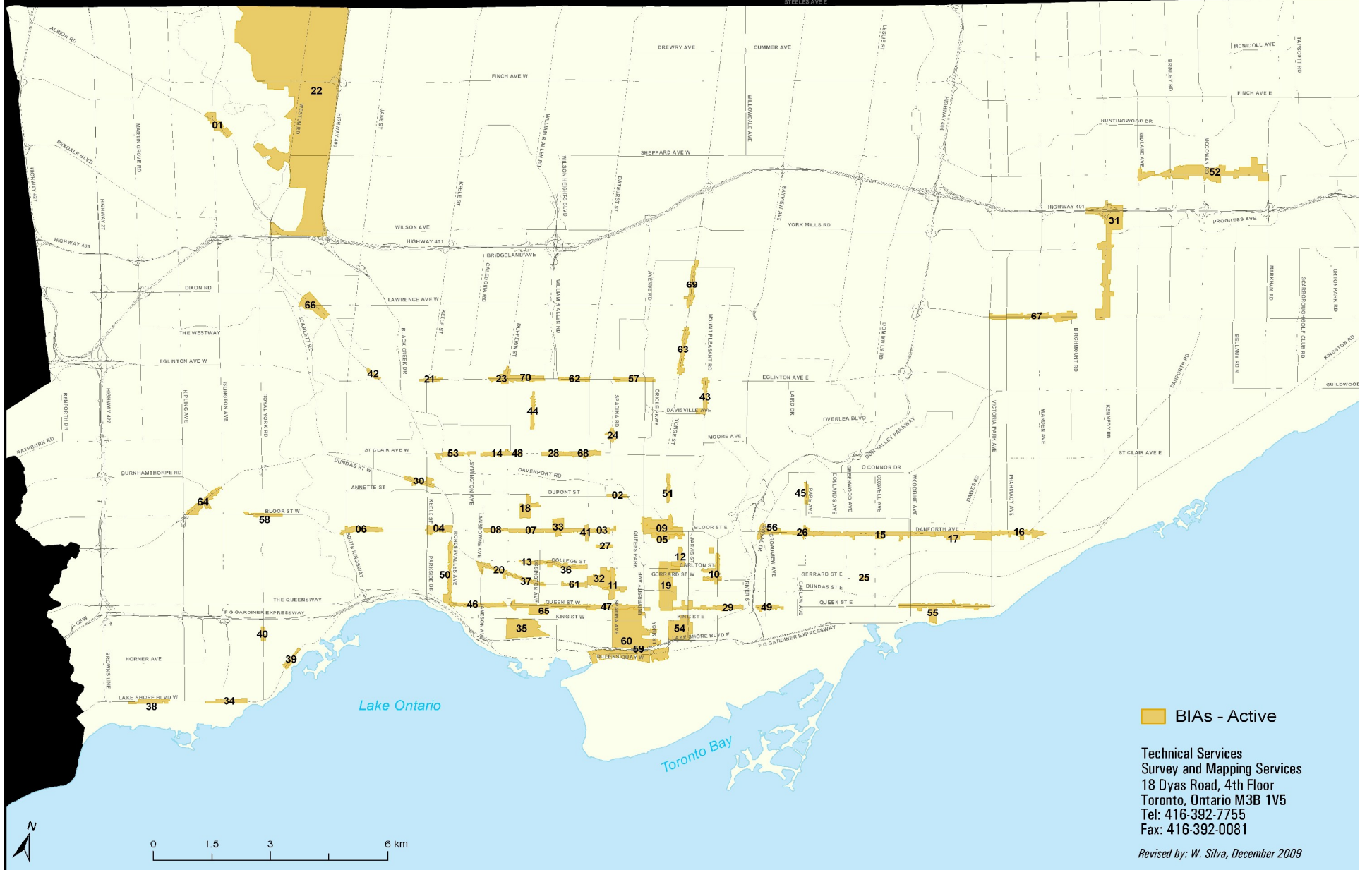
SIGNATURE

Gary Wright
Chief Planner and Executive Director
City Planning Division

ATTACHMENTS

Attachment 1: Business Improvement Areas Map

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 BIAs - Active

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Revised by: W. Silva, December 2009