

**Letter (July 27, 2005) From Richard Nelson, Co-Chair, Toronto Pedestrian Committee To Executive Director, Facilities And Real Estate**

“Subject: Toronto Pedestrian Committee Views on Nathan Phillips Square Design Competition

The Toronto Pedestrian Committee is interested in, excited by, and supportive of the City’s planned revitalization of Nathan Phillips Square. In aid of that project, we’re making the following observations and recommendations. These notes are focused on improving access to the Square from the surrounding street grid.

Although most people get to Nathan Phillips Square on foot, it is surrounded by a number of pedestrian-unfriendly, even hostile, fixtures, which are discussed below. In general, the Pedestrian Committee wants to see walking access to the Square, for all pedestrians, improved and impediments to walking removed or mitigated.

In particular:

- (1) The Square invites people to cross Queen Street mid-block:
  - (a) an underground passage is provided between the parking garage and the Sheraton Centre, but it is mostly used by those destined to or originating from the PATH network. Using it to cross Queen Street, particularly northbound, requires retreating into the hotel to use its escalators. This route can be used only northbound between 10 p.m. and 6 a.m.;
  - (b) an overhead crossing is provided but can only be used northbound (the hotel doors are locked to southbound users). Its fate is presumably tied to the fate of the walkways, and its usability is at the whim of the hotel’s management; and
  - (c) ways of making Queen Street more crossable should be investigated as part of the Square’s revitalization:
    - i) crossing distances could be reduced. Depending on budget and other constraints, this might include a median (which would require reconfiguring the streetcar tracks), or it might include bulb-outs or other devices;
    - ii) a traffic signal about halfway between Bay Street and York Street would encourage both crossing, and compliance with traffic flows; and
    - iii) access to the Square from the south would be greatly improved if the use of the Queen Street frontage, as a parking bay, for buses and hot dog vendors, was reduced. Although the southern portion of the Bay Street frontage is dedicated to bus parking, it is rarely available for such (because

of illegally parked vehicles), so buses often combine to present a wall of vehicles to pedestrians venturing to cross Queen Street;

- (2) the slip lane from southbound Bay Street to westbound Queen Street should be removed;
- (3) the crossing of Bay Street at Albert Street requires a clumsy grade change on the west side, which should be improved. The whole area at this crossing is cluttered and is difficult for the less able;
- (4) the west side of Bay from Queen Street to Hagerman Street does not present a pedestrian-friendly face. Although pedestrians walking on the west side of Bay Street can divert slightly to the west to use the Square, a kind of uninviting wall is presented to pedestrians on the east side of Bay Street. The Bay Street entrances to the parking garage (one of which is long disused) pose a challenge, but this side of Bay Street might be made more inviting or convenient to pedestrians. Note that the areas to the north and south of the ramps are used as informal (and in fact illegal) parking zones;
- (5) the intersection of Bay Street and Hagerman Street, together with the ramps to the loading dock and to the parking garage, presents an odd geometry (and currently non-standard markings), which is not conducive or comfortable pedestrian use. It should be improved;
- (6) the intersection of Armoury Street and Chestnut Street should be the north-western gateway to Nathan Phillips Square for pedestrians and cyclists, but its non-orthogonal geometry, unclear sightlines, and entrance to the parking garage make it uncomfortable and unclear. It could be improved;
- (7) the lane between Nathan Phillips Square and Osgoode Hall north from Queen Street engenders many pedestrian/motor vehicle conflicts, particularly as vehicles try to enter or leave Queen Street. Better approaches for vehicular access should be instituted; and
- (8) finally, the entrance of the parking garage on Queen Street engenders many pedestrian/motor vehicle conflicts. Improved design might mitigate this.

On behalf of the Toronto Pedestrian Committee, I would request that you give careful consideration to the above points of interest with the Nathan Phillips Square Design Competition.”