

September 7, 2004.

To: Planning and Transportation Committee

From: Commissioner of Urban Planning and Development Services

Subject: The Civic Improvement Program and its Relationship to the City Beautification Initiative.

Purpose:

This report presents the case for expanding the contribution of the Civic Improvement Program to the City's beautification initiatives.

Financial Implications and Impact Statement:

In adopting the recommendations of this report Council will be signaling its commitment to allocating increased resources to the Civic Improvement Program in support of the City's broader beautification objectives. The financial implications of approving specific civic improvement projects will be reported through Urban Development Services' annual capital budget process.

Recommendations:

It is recommended the Council:

1. Recognize the important contribution that the Civic Improvement Program can make to the overall attainment of the City's beautification objectives and support, in principle, the allocation of increased resources to the implementation of civic improvement projects.
2. Undertake at least one major civic improvement project in each Community Council district per year.
3. Endorse the Civic Improvement Program and process described in this report as the primary basis for selecting projects to be funded through the capital budget of Urban Development Services, subject to on-going annual reviews of the five-year program priorities.

4. Assess the financial implications of an enhanced Civic Improvement Program on an annual basis within the contexts of Urban Development Services' capital budget approval process and the priorities of the broader City Beautification Initiative.

Background:

The City of Toronto Civic Improvement Program is a modest but high value-added capital program administered by Urban Development Services (UDS). The program significantly enhances the on-going capital programs of other departments as well as Business Improvement Areas' initiatives and private sector city-building activities. Civic improvement projects apply to elements of the public realm such as the City's system of streets, parks, open spaces, public buildings and facilities. Civic improvement projects include streetscape improvements (special paving, widened sidewalks, tree planting and landscaping), the creation of special features (plazas, fountains, gardens and interpretative displays) and naturalization programs.

At the time of amalgamation it became clear that a program for civic improvements needed to be established across the entire City. As a first step, a classification system of civic improvement projects was developed through an analysis and integration of the City's built form elements, such as streets and pedestrian areas, as well as components of the open space and natural environment systems, including river valleys, parks and the waterfront. Examples of the results of this exercise are presented in Appendix A of this report where projects are grouped by "themes" into the classes of Places, Routes and Districts and then further distinguished by "type". This classification system has served to provide the framework in which to identify project priorities taking into consideration such other factors as current planning and community initiatives, and the opportunities afforded through the redevelopment process and the City's other infrastructure programs.

A number of recent developments call for a re-assessment of the role of the Civic Improvement Program. With Council's adoption of the new Official Plan in November 2002 there is now a defined City-wide policy framework in which to evaluate and set priorities for future civic improvements. The Official Plan also calls for the launch of "Great City Campaigns" to develop new partnerships, ideas, energies and resources to accelerate the implementation of the Plan's objectives in key policy areas, including creating beautiful places that improve public spaces and streetscapes. This challenge has also been taken up through the formation of the "Roundtable on a Beautiful City", which is charged with the task of forming an alliance among resident groups, design and development interests, businesses and others to improve the cleanliness, vibrancy, architectural quality and beauty of the City. Furthermore, included in Council's recently approved list of nine key city-building priorities for the 2003 – 2006 Term, is the objective of "making Toronto a clean and beautiful city". All these initiatives suggest that the Civic Improvement Program can and should play a heightened role in meeting the City's overall beautification objectives. In particular, the program should be strengthened and implemented in a manner that gives support to and helps advance the Campaigns and Roundtable initiatives.

Comments:

a) Civic Improvement Program - Partnering, Funding and Implementation.

As noted above, the City's Civic Improvement Program is administered by Urban Development Services staff in conjunction with the capital works programs of other City departments and related private sector development initiatives. This approach creates the synergies that help to leverage modest capital expenditures on civic improvement projects to produce maximum results in terms of enhancing the public realm and quality of place.

The opportunities for civic improvement projects can arise from the mandates of several City departments. Urban Development Services undertakes secondary plan and area studies, including Avenue Studies and Community Improvement Plans, which may identify specific civic improvement projects that will help to achieve the built form objectives of the Official Plan. Economic Development Culture and Tourism is involved in the creation and maintenance of parks and other open spaces, as well as the coordination of Business Improvement Areas, economic improvement plans (e.g. Employment Revitalization Areas) and in promoting arts, culture and tourism projects. Works and Emergency Services maintain and improve major elements of the City's infrastructure such as its streets, boulevards and bridges. Corporate Services looks after many of the City's buildings and the City's squares and other public places. The Civic Improvement Program helps enable these City departments to work together to maximize the effectiveness of the City's infrastructure investment programs.

Many civic improvement projects are conceived in the community through local interest groups such as the Business Improvement Areas. They can also result from public consultation as part of the processes for developing Secondary Plans, Avenue Studies, and Community Improvement Plans. Urban Development Services staff are typically involved in facilitating community outreach and consultation, along with helping to develop the project design and implementation strategy.

The funding of civic improvement projects can vary considerably, from 100 percent public funding for City-initiated or community-based projects, to 50/50 funding for projects in Business Improvement Areas, to full private funding of projects negotiated through the development approval process. In addition, independent private donations are sometimes made to civic improvement projects.

The City's funding and implementation of civic improvement projects is usually carried out on an inter-departmental basis. Funding for core activities is typically included in the capital budget of the relevant functional or "line" department. The relatively modest amount of "incremental" funding required to improve the quality of urban design and bring about the "civic improvement" component of the project is provided through the capital budget of Urban Development Services. This capital funding has averaged around \$1.5 million annually over past years.

Collaboration between the City and the Business Improvement Areas has produced examples of cost-effective and efficient civic improvement projects. Each project is funded on a 50/50 cost-shared basis between the City and the Business Improvement Area. The experience in Business Improvement Areas has shown that public and private partnerships can build upon the positive community spirit and vitality of an area to bring about significant improvements to the public realm

In certain situations, Urban Development Services staff may be able to create opportunities to cost share civic improvement projects with the private sector through the creative application of the development approval process. When private developers construct a new building they contribute to the beautification of the street(s) by rebuilding the sidewalk abutting the development site to the City's streetscape design standards. Consequently, this work is achieved at no cost to the City. Over a period of time, especially in areas of significant growth, such incremental improvements can grow into a harmonized and consistently upgraded public space without incurring any public expenditure. If available, funds from the capital budget of Urban Development Services are used to fill the gaps between these privately funded sidewalk improvements and so maximize returns to the City.

Contributions of outside funding to the City's capital budget can provide a major boost to civic improvement initiatives and make many more projects possible. Private donations, which have proven to be very beneficial to the City in the past, are being pursued and it may be possible to lever public funds to even greater effect by promoting public/private partnership initiatives.

b) Civic Improvement Program and the City Beautiful Initiative.

Seven years into amalgamation the City is well on the way to forging its new identity and establishing the values that will guide Council's continuing quest to improve the quality of the urban experience for all those who participate in the life of our city. Mention has already been made of Council's adoption of the City's first Official Plan and other guiding documents including the Strategic Plan, the Culture Plan, the Social Development Strategy and the Environmental Plan. More particular plans and strategies include the Community Safety Plan, the Bike Plan, the Water Efficiency Plan, the Five-Year Tourism Action Plan and numerous others.

Importantly, at its meeting on July 20, 2004, Council adopted a set of nine priorities for the 2003 – 2006 Term (see Clause 4 of Report No. 6 of the Policy and Finance Committee). Included among these Council Term Priorities are a number of specific city-building goals one of which is to “make Toronto a clean and beautiful city”. One of the ways cited to achieve this goal is to “demonstrate innovative approaches to beautification”.

In its broadest sense beautification embraces a wide-range of city-building activities and refers to both the public and private domains. The physical beauty of built-form features can be linked to those of the natural environment as well as wider issues of social vitality

and civic pride. It has become generally recognized that the pressures of amalgamation and other forces have led to a level of neglect and deterioration in the upkeep and appearance of the City. There is a perception that the City has a less cared for look and that we are falling behind our urban competitors in terms of the quality and attractiveness of Toronto's urban form.

Recently, a number of specific responses have arisen in reaction to these disquieting trends. The "Roundtable on a Beautiful City" is being formed to, "... advise the Mayor and City Council and to engage and partner with the community on policies, programs and activities that will result in a clean, vibrant and beautiful city". The matters upon which the Roundtable is to provide advice include those related to urban design initiatives that will improve the design quality of public and private spaces. Other recent responses include the release of Economic Development Culture and Tourism's reports on "Our Common Grounds: Parks and Recreation Strategic Plan 2004" and "Defining the Public Realm: Waterfront Culture and Heritage Infrastructure Plan". Both of these reports present bold plans for revitalizing important elements of the public realm. Another response has been a proposal that the City, in association with the Board of Trade, canvas sponsorship and support for an expanded and more high profile City Architecture & Urban Design Awards program to give greater prominence to the need to encourage architectural and urban design excellence.

Clearly, the issue of city beautification has become a major concern of the civic administration and it is now being addressed, as a priority issue, on a variety of fronts. As noted in the terms of reference for the Roundtable on a Beautiful City, "... the cross-cutting nature of beautiful city issues (means) policy-related support will be required from several program areas including city planning, urban design, solid waste management, transportation services, municipal licensing and standards, parks and recreation, economic development, culture, and tourism". The Council Term Priorities also stress the need to engage the community in these processes. The Commissioner of Urban Development Services has been identified as the lead in coordinating the City's overall beautification strategy and for coming forward with proposals to advance this important component of the city-building agenda. The Mayor's report on the Council Term Priorities recognizes that "... these are big priorities and require bold innovative approaches".

It is against this backdrop that the role of the Civic Improvement Program in furthering the City's beautification initiatives has to be re-assessed and revised priorities established. The Civic Improvement Program brings with it the advantages of an existing administrative structure with built-in processes of inter-departmental cooperation, community input and financial partnering, along with a history of successfully completed projects. The program is an effective delivery model for implementing public realm beautification projects. Civic improvement projects should be seen as providing key opportunities to advance the City's overall beautification initiative. Therefore, priority should be given to projects that:

1. support the efforts of the Roundtable on a Beautiful City by enhancing the quality of the public realm;
2. implement the built-form policies of the Official Plan and contribute to the Plan's "Great City Campaigns";
3. support related local planning initiatives and the efforts of other City departments to improve the attractiveness or beautification of the City as a place in which to live, work and invest;
4. advance the objectives of creating a safer and more environmentally sustainable City;
5. realize partnering opportunities between the City and the private sector for funding and construction;
6. engage public and community involvement in the conception, development, implementation and maintenance of the project, and
7. contribute to the coordination of City departments and agencies in the timely and cost-effective implementation of capital works projects that reflect Council Term Priorities.

Conclusions:

This report describes the present Civic Improvement Program in terms of its scope and application. The beautification of spaces in the public realm brings obvious physical and social benefits such as the enhancement of the visual appeal, safety and image of the City. This, in turn, leads to further gains and co-benefits such as increased tourism, greater economic growth and a strengthened feeling of civic pride and quality of place. The Official Plan notes that "beautiful, comfortable, safe and accessible streets, parks, open spaces and public buildings are a key shared asset".

Several emerging developments have brought the City's whole beautification agenda more strongly to the forefront. Among Council's recently adopted Term Priorities is the goal to "make Toronto a clean and beautiful city". A Roundtable on a Beautiful City is to be established to "advise the Mayor and Council and to partner with the community on policies, programs and activities that will result in a clean, vibrant and beautiful city". The civic administration has been charged with treating beautification as a priority issue that is to be tackled on all possible fronts.

The Civic Improvement Program has as its focus the aesthetic enhancement of the public realm and offers a direct means by which Council can employ the City's capital budget process to beautify its streets, parks, open spaces and public buildings. It is an established program that has the advantages of built-in processes of inter-departmental cooperation, community input and financial partnering, accompanied by a history of successfully completed projects. The relatively modest capital cost (around \$1.5 million annually) of

the Civic Improvement Program has consistently yielded high value-added results. This report suggests that now is the time to re-assess the role of the Civic Improvement Program in terms of its contribution to Council's broader city beautification objectives and revise project and budget priorities accordingly.

Appendix A of this report presents examples of civic improvement projects, classified by theme and type, along with a map of potential project locations. The projects funded through the 2005-2009 capital budget of Urban Development Services will be subject to annual review as part of the budget process. The actual order with which projects are implemented will continue to be influenced by the schedules of the capital works programs of other City departments, related funding considerations, community input, and private sector opportunities.

This report also recommends that at least one major civic improvement project be undertaken in each Community Council district per year. Such a commitment will likely require capital funding beyond the current annual level of around \$1.5 million and may add to the operating costs of the Urban Design section of Urban Development Services (UDS) as a result of increased staffing needs. These latter costs will be reported upon separately as part of the UDS 2005 budget submission.

It is timely to note that the Mayor reported that there were two messages that stand out from what Torontonians told the administration during the Listening to Toronto exercise in January 2004: "Be bold!" and "Spend for Impact". The Civic Improvement Program provides the opportunity to heed this advice in the most timely, efficient and productive manner.

Contact:

Alka Lukatela
Program Manager, Urban Design
Tel: 416-392-1131
Fax: 416-392-1744

Eric Pedersen
Acting Director, Urban Design
Tel: 416-392-1130
Fax: 416-392-1744

Robert Freedman
Acting Chief Planner and Executive Director
City Planning Division

Paula M. Dill
Commissioner
Urban Development Services

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List of Attachments:

Appendix A: Building the Beautiful City: Places, Routes, Districts
Urban Design, Strategic Opportunities for Civic Improvements