

# HARBORD VILLAGE RESIDENTS' ASSOCIATION

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Toronto, ON M5S 1X1



December 11, 2011

Public Works and Infrastructure Committee  
c/o Candy Davidovits  
10th Floor, West Tower  
Toronto City Hall 100 Queen Street West  
Toronto, ON M5H 2N2

Dear Committee Members:

The board of the Harbord Village Residents Association (HVRA) has voted unanimously to oppose the modified InfoToGo pillars that are being installed on Toronto streets, and to respectfully ask for your support to see the original decision revisited.

HVRA supported the Integrated Street Furnishings Program when approved in 2006/2007. Our support was based on the successful implementation of the Vibrant Streets Guidelines in the HVRA-sponsored College Street Revitalization Initiative. We particularly liked the stated objective of the Program to “dramatically improve and celebrate the quality of our public spaces through exceptional design” (from Vibrant Streets Guidelines).

We cannot support the current implementation. Our neighbourhood and others deserve better.

The design of the current InfoToGo pillars is a recycling of the Mega-bin proposal that citizens rejected in 2006. It is driven by increasing the ad size – as opposed to providing a way-finding function. Both Vibrant Streets Guidelines and the Integrated Furnishings RFP directed against this imbalance of priorities.

Our concerns with the modified proposal are these:

- Pillar placement perpendicular to the curb maximizes sidewalk obstruction and blockage of sightlines. It forces ‘way-finding’ users to further obstruct pedestrian traffic flow when viewing the way-finding spine. If the proposed design is retained, the pillar should be placed entirely in the furnishing zone parallel to the curb.
- The pillar redesign appears to be entirely driven by maximizing advertising size and exposure, with secondary consideration to the way-finding function. The Public Realm Office responds that they intend to match the billboards one-for-one with “non-ad” pillars to address the pillars way-finding deficiencies. Thus, we will have 120 sidewalk billboards – that citizens don’t want or need -- and another 120 ‘way-finding billboards’ all on crowded downtown streets, to make up for the fact that the “ad” billboards won’t fulfill their way-finding function.
- The proposed redesign is a major departure from the pillar proposals developed after extensive public consultation in 2006. The proposed billboards will have a significant negative impact on the look, feel and walkability of the city – as opposed to “improving our public spaces through exceptional design”.

The attached summary has been prepared by an HVRA resident who was involved in developing the Vibrant Streets Guidelines. Contrary to what was stated or implied in the Staff Report accompanying PW5.5, the assessment indicates that the design, function and advertising aspects are in fact not consistent with the Guidelines – and we ask you to consider this assessment.

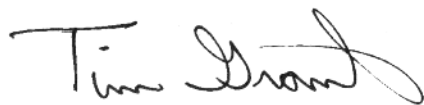
We also believe that the Staff Report was deficient in its assessment of alternatives -- in particular, the option of simply removing problematic electronics from the original, Vibrant Streets-compliant pillar. In addition to instant recognition as a way-finding element and its less oppressive ad size, the concave face and overhead glass canopy or the original InfoToGo pillar provided a welcoming, sheltered space for viewing a larger information panel. And its smaller depth perpendicular to the curb (with electronics removed) also makes it less obstructive.

We therefore suggest that by direct statement or omission, PWIC and Council were not provided with appropriate information on which to make a properly informed decision on PW5.5.

HVRA is respectfully asking the Committee and City Councilors to “put the public back in the public realm” by recommending that Council revisit their July 2011 decision; directing Staff to complete the current way-finding study, and incorporate that information into a more accurate and balanced staff report on pillar design and placement options; directing staff to obtain public comments on the new report; and, bringing the entire matter back to Council for decision as soon as is reasonably practical.

HVRA embraces considerable expertise in this matter from a variety of perspectives. We would be pleased to make this available to the Public Realm Office during a refashioning of a proposal for Council’s eventual approval, one that incorporates advertising within an optimized way-finding design.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Tim Grant", with a stylized flourish at the end.

Tim Grant, Chair  
416-960-1244, [chair@harbordvillage.com](mailto:chair@harbordvillage.com)

PS. HVRA has over 400 paid members in the neighbourhood bounded by Bloor, Spadina, College and Bathurst.

cc: Committee Members

## Assessment of InfoToGo Pillar Design Modification vs. Vibrant Streets Guidelines

In the Staff Report requesting Council support for a proposed pillar redesign, Staff commit that they will "continue to vigilantly enforce the placement guidelines outlined in the Council endorsed Vibrant Streets Guidelines document to ensure pedestrian passage remains unobstructed."

However, a review of the Report against Vibrant Streets Guidelines and the RFP appears contradictory.  
See [http://www.toronto.ca/transportation/walking/ped\\_environment.htm#vibrant](http://www.toronto.ca/transportation/walking/ped_environment.htm#vibrant) -- for Vibrant Streets.  
See <http://www.toronto.ca/legdocs/mmis/2011/pw/bgrd/backgroundfile-39000.pdf> -- for Staff Report.

### **What VSG has to say about sidewalk space priorities...**

- ✓ VSG (P28/30) states: Provision of the Pedestrian Clearway is high priority, with recommended minimum width of 2.1m – however, Clearway width should be sized to suit expected pedestrian flow. In rare and extreme cases, the minimum width may be reduced to not less than 1.525m". Once an appropriate Clearway is assigned, availability of space for a furnishing or other use can be assessed.
- X Staff report graphic shows: Pedestrian Clearway is reduced to the "rare and extreme" dimension of 1.525m dimension, to accommodate the InfoToGo Pillars placed perpendicular to the curb.

### **What VSG has to say about furniture design and placement...**

- ✓ VSG (P30) states: dimensions of installed street furniture should respond to the width of the Furnishing and Planting Zone, for example, on a narrow boulevard where the Furnishing and Planting Zone is 1.0m wide, furniture should be narrow enough to comfortably fit within this space.
- ✓ VSG (P34) states: no furniture shall be placed within the Pedestrian Clearway zone, or such that use of the furnishing will interfere with the Clearway.
- ✓ VSG (P34) states: furnishings must be accessible to all
- ✓ VSG (P34) states: no furniture shall obstruct pedestrian, cyclist or driver sight lines.
- X Staff Report shows: a 'one-size-blocks-all' proposal. The billboards "bully sidewalks" by demanding perpendicular placement that exceeds furnishing space available on most downtown streets.
- X Staff Report shows: pillars set back only 0.2m (~8") from the narrow sidewalk. "Use of the furnishing" requires visitors to block the Pedestrian Clearway -- which violates VSG. How comfortable will this be for a family of five, or a wheelchair user, or someone with reduced vision -- to block pedestrian flow while they strain to see high/low info on the narrow spine of the new pillar?
- X Installations show: Most obstruct the Pedestrian Clearway, with no setback. Sightlines are blocked.

### **What VSG has to say about advertising on street furnishings...**

- ✓ VSG (P39/49) states: The design of new street furniture must demonstrate appropriateness for its intended use, not as a venue for advertising. This means the public must be able to recognize the functionality and use of the elements. The size and scale of amenities should not be increased in order to accommodate larger advertising faces.
- X Staff Report shows: Advertising clearly drives the size and format of this "furnishing", which offers only secondary positioning and limited space for the its way-finding purpose. It is clearly a billboard.
- X Staff Report states: the modified pillar design allows advertisers to move from 3'x5' ad format to the more standard 4'x6' – with pillar size clearly increased to accommodate larger advertising faces.

### **What VSG has to say about public input on the subject...**

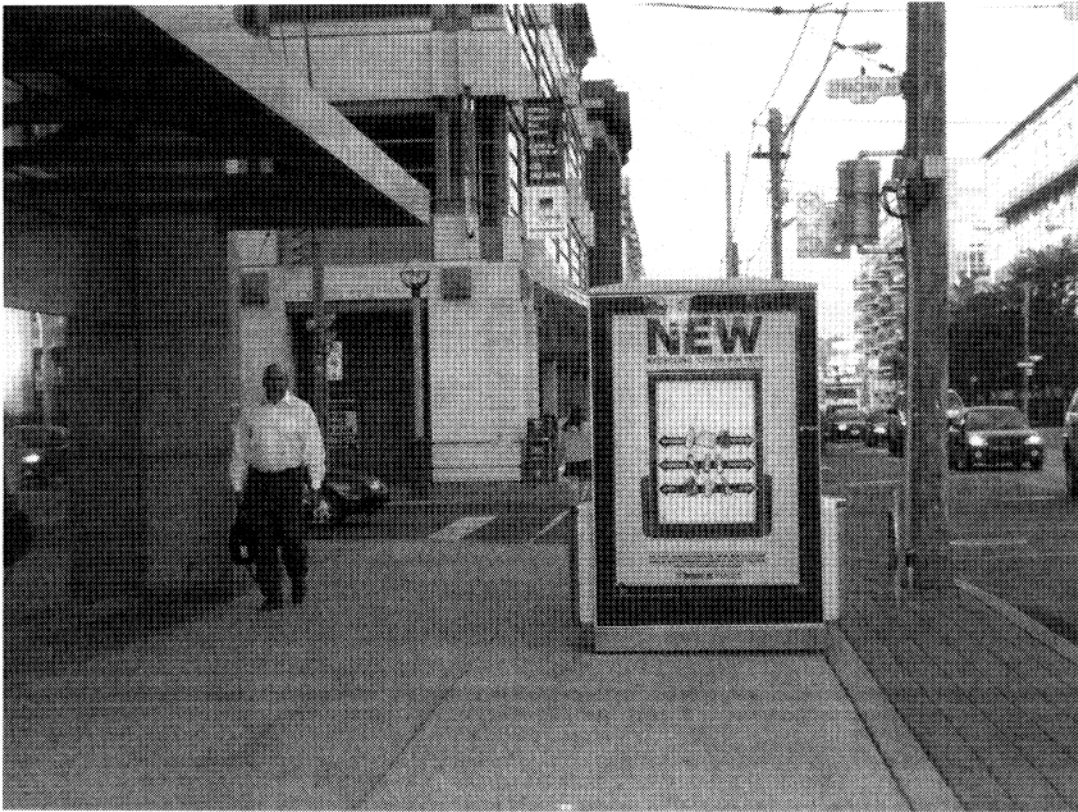
- ✓ VSG (P43) presents a summary of the extensive public consultation process associated with the coordinated street furniture program, and development of Vibrant Street Guidelines. Key Themes and Recommendations (Item 1) states: Workshop participants, those that e-mailed the City and those that filled out questionnaires expressed very clearly that the design and functionality of all street furniture items must be primary: expressing the opinion that Megabins are advertising vehicles rather than functional recycling bins. "They are opposed to them, and any other item that, in the opinion, functions as a "billboard first and street amenity second".
- X Staff report shows: a modified Megabin, with "way-finding" on the spine vs. garbage/recycling slots.

### **What RFP 9103-06-7316 for Coordinated Street Furniture Program states...**

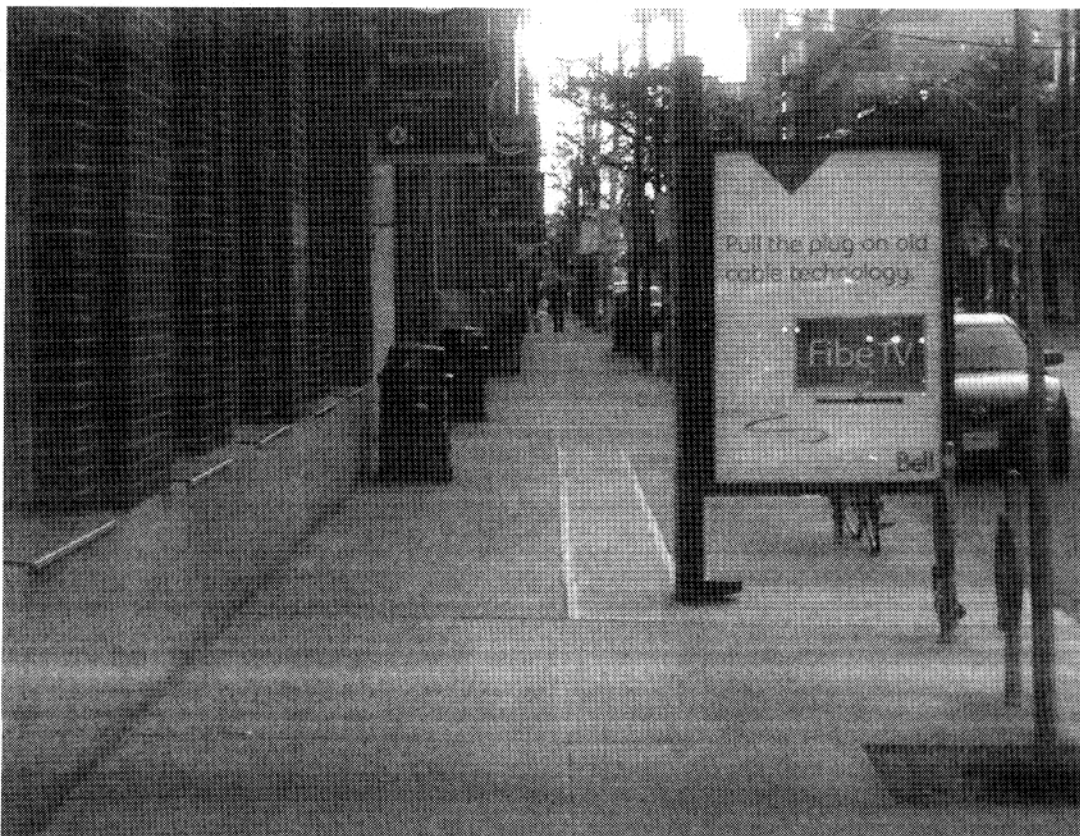
- ✓ Section 3.13 P24: The design of new street furniture must, first and foremost, demonstrate suitability for its intended uses. The design must be driven by the needs of its users and the public must be instantly able to recognize the functionality of elements. The size and scale should not be unduly modified or enlarged simply to accommodate larger advertising panels. Advertising must be tastefully integrated into the design of street furniture, not visa versa (sic).
- X Staff report shows: enlarged ad panels, with suboptimal way-finding integrated into billboard design.

**Attachment 1: Spot the difference...Megabin vs InfoToGo Pillar...**

*The vilified Megabin -- with garbage/recycling slots at the end of a billboard...*



*The proposed InfoToGo Pillar – with 'way-finding' info at the end of a billboard...*





## Attachment 2: Recent Pillar Installation on College Street, Opposite MaRS Site.

**Problem:** A clearly-defined Furnishing Zone and Pedestrian Clearway width that suits the volume of traffic – obstructed by the InfoToGo Pillar on the north (...and non-compliant bike rings on the south...).

***Solution?*** Relocate pillar to Furnishing Zone, parallel to the curb, to remove obstruction, and provide a safe location for users to access Way-finding Info -- outside of the pedestrian flow.



### Attachment 3: Recent Pillar Installation on Queen Street, West of Spadina.

**Problem:** Staff have reduced Vibrant Streets Guidelines to a simplistic rule of measuring 2.1m from building face to billboards – without consideration for the space required for pedestrian flow, or set-back of furnishings to allow way-finding usage without obstructing Clearway.

**Solution? Follow the Guidelines...** Vibrant Streets Guidelines require staff to assess sidewalk space upfront before installing furnishings– giving priority to the Pedestrian Clearway. In this case, installation parallel to the curb -- in line with the fire hydrant and tree pits -- would be a less obstructive while allowing users to access way-finding information, outside of pedestrian flow.

