

HARBORD VILLAGE RESIDENTS' ASSOCIATION

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April 1, 2012

Public Works and Infrastructure Committee
Toronto City Hall,
100 Queen Street West
Toronto, ON M5H 2N2

PW13.8: Toronto Street Furniture Program – Proposed Info Pillar Placement Guidelines

Dear Committee Members:

This is to record our objections to the Info Pillar Placement Guidelines proposed by Staff in the above-noted report. Specifically:

- We object to Principle 4. This directly contradicts/explicitly weakens the Vibrant Streets Guideline requirement for top priority to be placed on a straight, clear, continuous, generous Pedestrian Clearway, by '*designing in' bottlenecks that are made even more obstructive when maps are in use.* It also proposes "case by case exceptions", beyond those allowed by the Guidelines (VSG Pg 31).
- We support Principle 3 for added clarity, but ONLY if rewritten to read: The *optimal-permitted* location for Info Pillars (***subject to meeting all other Guidelines***) is completely within the Furnishing and Planting Zone of the sidewalk, ~~where~~-***if*** they can be appropriately integrated into the streetscape and not impede the passage of pedestrians ***when way-finding maps are being used.***
- We don't object to Principles 1, 5, 6 and 8, but we suggest they are either trivial or unnecessary.
- We support Principles 2 and 7. These principles add value to Vibrant Streets Guidelines, by ensuring maximum distribution of the Pillars across the city, and providing needed clarification that Astral is responsible for restoration of all sidewalk surfaces following installation.

Please see Attachment 1 to this letter for detailed comments on each Principle.

At your January 4th meeting, the Manager, Public Realm Unit was directed to '*provide a report to include the feasibility of design changes, including contractual obligations, for the current Info Pillar to address concerns raised by the public, and better facilitate an effective way-finding strategy.*' Of interest, public concerns with the Pillar redesign, installation and lack of public involvement were reinforced and significantly augmented by the Toronto Design Review Panel at their February 13th meeting.

Instead of providing meaningful assessment of Info Pillar design and placement options to address identified concerns, the Staff Report simply indicates that:

- Astral isn't interested in redesigning the modified Info Pillar, or in repositioning the modified pillars in a less obstructive manner, e.g., parallel to the curb.
- Staff have proposed eight "enhanced placement guidelines" (the principles referred to above, see Appendix A of the staff report) that they "are confident will ensure that safe and pleasing streetscapes remain the primary focus".

Just as we respectfully suggested that the previous Staff Report misled Council as to the acceptability of the modified Pillar design, we respectfully suggest that representing the proposed Pillar Placement Guidelines (Principles) as 'enhancements' to Vibrant Streets Guidelines is equally misleading.

With respect to sidewalk design and street furnishing placement, Vibrant Streets Guidelines are clear:

- Top priority is designation of the Pedestrian Clearway: a clear, straight, unobstructed continuous path of sidewalk with a reasonable width to serve pedestrian flow (VSG Pg 27, 30 etc). By definition, *the Clearway should continue through each block without obstruction or bottlenecks.*
- The width of the Pedestrian Clearway should be determined prior to the width of the Furnishing and Planting Zone, to ensure it supports existing or projected pedestrian volumes (VSG Pg 30). *While minimum widths are specified, the intent is clearly to maximize the width of this important zone.*
- Where sidewalk space permits, a parallel Furnishing and Planting Zone may be provided 'to contain furniture, street trees and other fixed objects'. The preferred location of the zone is between the Clearway and the street, to provide a vehicular buffer for pedestrians (VSG Pg 27, 29, etc).
- No furnishing shall be placed within the Pedestrian Clearway zone, or such that use of the furnishing will interfere with the Clearway (VSG Pg 34).

With respect to street furnishing design, Vibrant Streets Guidelines are also very clear:

- A clear pedestrian pathway is essential for a functional and accessible streetscape. All street furniture should be placed outside of a straight, continuous sidewalk within the Pedestrian Clearway to best serve pedestrian movement. In situations where the width of the public boulevard is limited, the design of the street furniture must accommodate the limited available space. (VSG 7.4)
- The proportions of installed street furniture should respond to the width of the Furnishing and Planting Zone. For example, on a narrow boulevard where the Furnishings & Planting Zone is 1.0 metre wide, furniture should be narrow enough to fit comfortably within this space. (VSG 7.4)

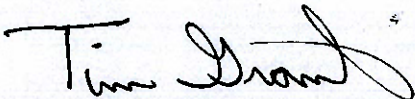
A review of the modified Info Pillars clearly shows that Astral has chosen to maximize ad space (60% more) and minimize map space (50% less) by providing one size of pillar versus 26 options for the ad-bearing transit shelters. This choice will clearly limit their ability to place them on Toronto sidewalks.

It's important to note that when Council approved the Staff Report for the Modified Info Pillars (July 2011), it was with the explicit commitment that Staff would "continue to vigilantly enforce the placement guidelines outlined in the Council endorsed Vibrant Streets Guidelines document, to ensure pedestrian passage remains unobstructed" (PW 5.5 Staff Report, Pg 3). The Guidelines remain an important part of Toronto's commitment to Pedestrians, and they continue to underpin the Astral contract.

As pointed out by the Toronto Design Review Panel (TDRP) members and many others, the modified Pillars are an inappropriate and unwelcome addition to Toronto streets -- that have public impact far in excess of the relatively insignificant 2% to 3% of advertising square footage that the Pillars represent.

However, if it is Council's decision not to push for a redesign and Astral's decision not to offer it, we ask that Staff be directed to report back as soon as possible with Info Pillar placement templates that are fully compliant with Vibrant Street Guidelines -- prior to the recommencement of Pillar installation.

Sincerely,



Tim Grant, Chair
416-960-1244, chair@harbordvillage.com

Attachments:

1. Assessment of proposed Info Pillar placement guidelines
2. Impact of "furnishing use" on pedestrian clearway

ATTACHMENT 1: ASSESSMENT OF PROPOSED INFO PILLAR PLACEMENT GUIDELINES

Principle 1: Info Pillars will be situated in locations where they provide a way-finding function, irrespective of the provision of any other way-finding element.

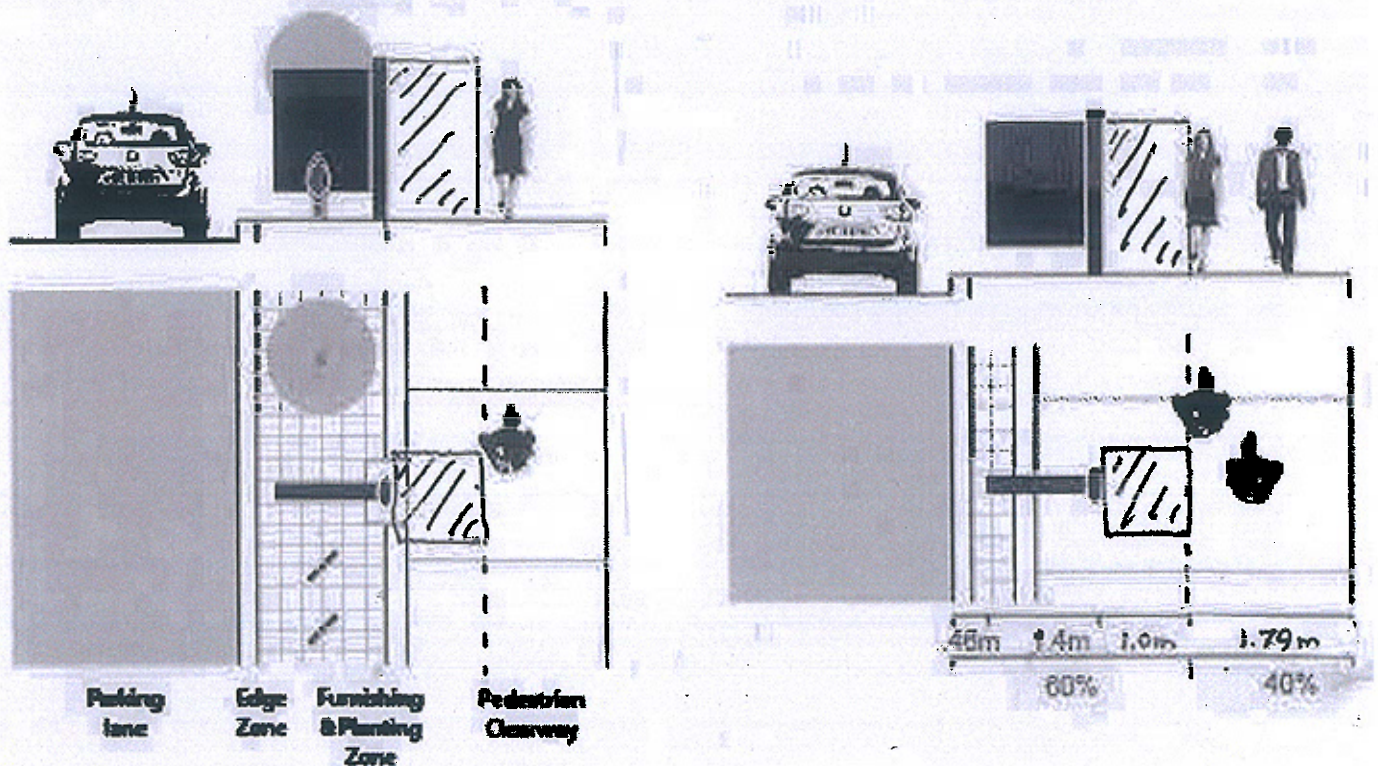
We suggest this principle is unnecessary. Given that the Info Pillars are notionally way-finding elements and will be located so as to best fulfill that function, it is not clear what value could be added by including this principle.

Principle 2: Subject to the requirements of these guidelines, every attempt will be made to ensure maximum distribution across the city.

We support this as an addendum to Vibrant Streets Guidelines. The Info Pillar is a way-finding amenity, and Toronto is developing a city-wide way-finding initiative – so there should be no reason why the Info Pillars couldn't and shouldn't be evenly spread across the 44 wards. However, it is clearly Astral's preference and current practice to install all Info Pillars in downtown wards; we support this principle as an Addendum to Vibrant Streets Guidelines.

Principle 3: The optimal location for Info Pillars is completely within the furnishing or planting zone of the sidewalk, where they can be appropriately integrated into the streetscape, and not impede the passage of pedestrians.

We object to this principle. We suggest there is no need for it, and it is misleading in its current form. While the principle is directionally correct, and reinforces the importance of containing furnishings to a defined Furnishing Zone for pedestrian benefit. However, it is misleading, in that Staff inappropriately present furnishing zone placement as the "optimal" location implying it is somehow discretionary –when it is the only street furnishing location that is allowed by Vibrant Streets Guidelines or the Accessibility Design Guidelines. This principle also falls short in that it overlooks the Vibrant Streets Guideline (S7.6) that "No furniture will be placed within the Pedestrian Clearway zone or such that use of the furnishing will interfere with the Clearway." With Info Pillars placed perpendicular to the curb, the Clearway obstruction is in the order of 1m – allowing space to view the tall, narrow maps as well as the obstruction from backpacks, wheelchairs, etc. The impact is illustrated here.



Principle 4: Where the Info Pillar is not completely within the furnishing zone, it shall consume only up to 40% of the sidewalk from the curb face to property line, secured privately-owned public setback, and/or building face.

We object to this principle. As indicated for Principle 3, this Principle proposes a weakening of current Vibrant Streets Guidelines with respect to allowing furnishings inside the Pedestrian Clearway. Accounting for the street

furnishing setback requirement discussed above, the Staff proposal more correctly becomes a 60% blockage of the sidewalk when the Info Pillar is being used for its intended function (see above). It also ignores the potential of the “as of right” 0.46m “marketing zone” at the face of retail properties, which would have further impact. There may be exceptions to this standard, and these will be handled on a case-by-case basis.

We object to this principle. This is an unnecessary and totally inappropriate weakening of the Vibrant Streets Guidelines. The Guidelines acknowledge (S7.4, Special Situations) that there will be special situations which will require ‘site specific solutions’ for the placement of furniture, but they are clearly not intended to weaken the core ‘sidewalk zone’ principles. No additional “out clauses” are needed, justified or supported – especially given experience to date with installations that Staff believe ‘meet Guidelines’.

Principle 5: Staff shall conduct pedestrian volume analysis in high pedestrian traffic areas to ensure pedestrian safety, particularly at peak hours.

We suggest this principle is unnecessary. Vibrant Streets Guidelines requires Staff to pre-define each street’s Pedestrian Clearway to handle current and future pedestrian volumes – so this should be done in any case where optimal Clearway width is unclear. This is likely being included to address the extraordinary sidewalk bottlenecks introduced by perpendicular placement of the Info Pillars – and such additional measures will be obviated when Pillar installations are made compliant with Vibrant Streets Guidelines.

Principle 6: Each location will be assessed to ensure that: [statements with respect to pedestrian safety, sightline obstruction, building access obstruction, view corridor obstruction...].

We suggest this principle is unnecessary. Vibrant Streets Guidelines requires (S6.4, S7.6, etc) consideration of sightline and safety issues and S7.4 explicitly mentions building access/egress. However, if it would help Staff in negotiations with Astral, we would support PWIC and Council in requiring an assessment of relevant view corridors to heritage properties and public art, to ensure they are maintained

Principle 7: With respect to Info Pillar installation, this clause essentially requires the contractor to “restore all surfaces to their prior condition”, including restoration of materials and all surface details. .

We support this principal. While decorative paving materials in furnishing zones have generally been restored, concrete surfaces have not been restored so as to blend with adjacent surface, and should be.

Principle 8: All Info Pillars will be installed with a wayfinding map.

We suggest this principal is unnecessary. The Info Pillar is a notionally a way-finding furnishing, so this requirements adds no value to Vibrant Streets Guidelines.

ATTACHMENT 2: IMPACT OF "FURNISHING USE" ON PEDESTRIAN CLEARWAY

