

Downtown Yonge Street Studies – Final Report

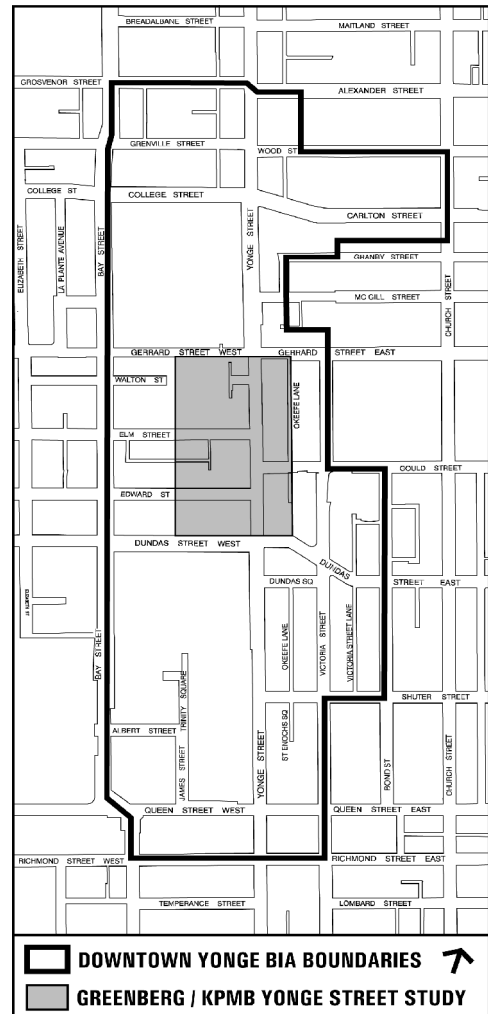
Date:	August 8, 2012
To:	Toronto and East York Community Council
From:	Director, Community Planning, Toronto and East York District
Wards:	Ward 27 – Toronto Centre-Rosedale
Reference Number:	11 267655 STE 27 TM

SUMMARY

Yonge Street is an important cultural corridor that serves as "Canada's Main Street". City Staff from all Divisions recognize the importance of Yonge Street and have undertaken as well as facilitated a number of initiatives to improve the conditions on this important street. At its meeting of November 29, 30 and December 1, 2011 City Council directed Staff to report back on the recommendations contained in the Downtown Yonge Business Improvement Area's public realm plan and the Yonge Street Study conducted by Greenberg/KPMB.

City Planning Staff have coordinated meetings with representatives of all affected Divisions and the responses to the recommendations contained in this report will reflect that consultation.

This report addresses each study individually and in the case of the Greenberg/KPMB study each recommendation, with the aim towards providing a synopsis of what the City is currently doing and, where appropriate, what would need to be done to implement specific initiatives. In cases where Staff think that the current model is working, Staff have recommended that no further action be taken.



RECOMMENDATIONS

The City Planning Division recommends that:

1. City Council receive for information the report (August 8, 2012) from the Director, Community Planning, Toronto and East York District, entitled "Downtown Yonge Street Studies – Final Report".

Financial Impact

The recommendation in this report has no financial impact.

DECISION HISTORY

On July 6, 2011 Councillor Wong-Tam, working with local businesses commissioned Ken Greenberg and KPMB to undertake a planning study for Yonge Street between Gerrard Street and Dundas Street, which complimented an earlier study commissioned by the Downtown Yonge Business Improvement Area. At its meeting of September 12, 2011, Toronto and East York Community Council approved the following motion:

1. That City Planning, Economic Development, Transportation Services, Technical Services, Parks Forestry and Recreation, and the TTC report back on the feasibility of the various recommendations in the Yonge Street Study, Downtown Yonge BIA Public Realm Strategy, and Downtown Yonge BIA Streetscape Guidelines;
2. That the divisions and agencies listed above work to produce a strategy for the implementation of the recommendations that are feasible; and
3. That the divisions and agencies listed above report back by the last quarter of 2011.

Subsequently, City Council adopted the following recommendation at its meeting of November 29, 30 and December 1, 2011:

City Council request City Planning, Transportation Services, Economic Development and Culture, Technical Services, and Parks, Forestry and Recreation Divisions, in consultation with the TTC, to report back to Council in the first quarter of 2012 with recommendations to implement the Yonge Street Studies outlined in the report titled Downtown Yonge Street Planning Studies – Status Report, dated October 24, 2011 including analysis of cost and feasibility and opportunities for pilot projects and various streetscape improvements.

Most recently City Staff brought forward a report entitled: "Downtown Tall Buildings Project – Consultant's Study, Public Consultation and Implementation" at the February 14, 2012 meeting of Toronto and East York Community Council. Although referred back to staff for further study, the report reviewed and recommended that Yonge Street be designated as a "Special Character Street" between Front Street and the south side of Davenport Road. The portion of Yonge Street between Gerrard Street and Dundas Street is not designated as a "High Street", but is in the "Special Character Street" area. This

designation generally acknowledges the heritage character of Yonge Street and its status as "Canada's Main Street".

ISSUE BACKGROUND

Study Recommendations and Staff Commentary

This report discusses four separate initiatives. The Downtown Yonge Business Improvement Association's (DYBIA) request to amend the Yonge Street Community Improvement Plan (CIP), the DYBIA's Public Realm Initiative, the DYBIA streetscape guidelines, and the Greenberg/KPMB Study commissioned by Councillor Wong-Tam to examine opportunities to improve the Yonge Street built form and public realm between Gerrard Street and Dundas Street. A summary of the documents is available at the end of the report (Attachment 1).

Request to Amend the Yonge Street Community Improvement Plan

The DYBIA had requested that the City of Toronto amend the Yonge Street CIP to include the public realm initiative and the streetscape guidelines. City of Toronto Planning Staff do not believe that a CIP is the appropriate mechanism for implementing these initiatives and is, in some cases, redundant. CIP's are established for the purpose of creating a zone where incentives can be applied where they would otherwise not be permitted. For example, the Yonge Street CIP was created to facilitate the façade improvement program of the BIA, among other reasons. City of Toronto Planning Staff believe that the Public Realm Strategy can be addressed differently, as discussed below and that there is no need to enshrine the streetscape guidelines in the CIP, also discussed below.

Downtown Yonge Business Improvement Area – Public Realm Strategy

The DYBIA public realm strategies make a number of suggestions as to how the public realm could be improved (Attachment 1 in this report). Many of the suggestions fall within the purview of City Planning in the sense that City Planning would be primarily responsible for seeing to their implementation during the development review process. For example, the DYBIA recommends that the TTC staircase be internalized at the north west corner of Yonge Street and Dundas Street, City Planning supports this initiative and has been successful in getting the applicant for the Atrium on Bay (595 Bay Street) expansion to incorporate it into their design. Ultimately, City Planning believes that the development review process is the logical tool for implementing many of the larger projects proposed in the DYBIA public realm strategy. Individual projects that do not fall within the scope of a new development can be achieved by liaising with the appropriate City Division and could potentially be funded through Section 37 of the *Planning Act*.

Downtown Yonge Business Improvement Area – Streetscape Guidelines

The Downtown Yonge Streetscape Guidelines have been enshrined in the online Streetscape Manual for the City of Toronto and no further action need be taken in that regard. See:

<http://wx.toronto.ca/inter/plan/streetscape.nsf/e7df501c661be4fc852574330041f374/7c16833e86f464378525756a0041ae4a?OpenDocument>

Yonge Street Planning Study by Greenberg/KPMB – Recommendations

A number of recommendations are made in the Greenberg/KPMB Study and will be explored below, many are public realm recommendations that are more appropriately reported on by Transportation Services staff (for example, the recommendation for a Yonge Street Pedestrian Pilot Project). Although not a pilot project, a direct result of the KPMB/Greenberg study was the Celebrate Yonge Street Festival which was approved by City Council at its meeting of June 6th, 7th, and 8th, 2012.

<http://www.toronto.ca/legdocs/mmis/2012/te/bgrd/backgroundfile-46859.pdf>

In formulating responses to the specific recommendations contained in the Study, City Planning held two meetings with staff from various divisions to respond to the recommendations and discuss initiatives may already be underway to address the recommendations of the report. Meetings were held on June 19th and June 26th, 2012 and attended by representatives of Transportation Services (Transportation Services, Pedestrian Projects and Public Realm), Economic Development and Culture (Special Events, Business Incubation and Development, and Cultural Affairs), City Planning (Community Planning, Policy and Research, Urban Design and Heritage) and Toronto Buildings (Sign By-law Unit).

Greenberg/KPMB Recommendation 1: Widen Sidewalks & Reduce to 2 Lanes of Traffic

Staff Response

The study recommends widening the sidewalks on Yonge Street and reducing the number of vehicle lanes from four to two. It is recognized that there may be more pedestrians on Yonge Street than anywhere else in the City, and wider sidewalks with sidewalk cafes are desirable. However, to make this change, an Environmental Assessment (EA) Study would be required to assess the impacts on Yonge Street and on the surrounding road network. Also, if implemented, major reconstruction work would be required on this section of Yonge Street. Funds would need to be allocated in the Transportation Services Capital Budget for both the EA study and for implementation of any recommended changes on Yonge Street.

Greenberg/KPMB Recommendation 2: Develop Flexible Streets

Staff Response

Flexible Streets mean different things to different people, in some cases it can mean the application of rolled curbs which has been done in the City of Toronto on Street P in Regent Park. Market Street, although not implemented, is proposed to be constructed in such a way that a portion of the roadway can be used for sidewalk cafes during the warmer months and parking during the winter months. Flexible streets also mean streets can be used in different fashions, by different transportation modes at different times. For example, a street could be pedestrian only at off-peak hours while remaining open to vehicles at other times, or be predominantly pedestrian while still allowing access to public transit, bicycles and service vehicles. The Public Realm Section is currently working on a standardized City of Toronto definition and design for a flexible street that could be implemented, and are bringing it forward to an internal working group committee for consideration.

As with Recommendation 1, a Class EA would have to be performed before any such options could be considered for Yonge Street. If Council recognizes this as a priority for Yonge Street, appropriate funds will have to be allocated for such an assessment.

Greenberg/KPMB Recommendation 3: Pilot Projects

Staff Response

Development and implementation of a pilot project to widen the sidewalks and reduce the vehicular lanes on Yonge Street may be useful in providing an opportunity for study and would provide input to an environmental assessment study. However, it requires considerable planning and assessment of impacts on the surrounding road network, and may not provide a true picture of the long term effects. The Celebrate Yonge Street Festival, which is planned for August and September of this year by the Downtown Yonge Business Improvement Association, will provide some opportunity to assess the benefits and impacts of a longer term change in the configuration of this section of Yonge Street. The Greenberg/KPMB study also recommends that new pilot projects be developed and implemented in order to enhance the public realm.

Greenberg/KPMB Recommendation 4: Dundas Street Second Exit

Staff Response

The Greenberg/KPMB study reviews and recommends that a second exit for Dundas Station be created at the north end of the platform (in the vicinity of Edward Street and Gould Street). City Planning supports this initiative and opportunities will be explored to implement this through the development application process. Ideal potential locations could be any redevelopment that arises at the site of the former Empress Hotel (335 Yonge Street), or the current site of the World's Biggest Bookstore (20 Edward Street).

Greenberg/KPMB Recommendation 5: Building on Ryerson's Public Realm Initiatives

Staff Response

City Staff work extensively with Ryerson University on an ongoing basis to facilitate improvements to the public realm and support Ryerson's public realm initiatives. For example, City Staff implemented the Gould Street Pedestrian Pilot Project which has subsequently become permanent. City Staff will continue to support Ryerson University in the implementation of their public realm initiatives.

Greenberg/KPMB Recommendation 6: Enhance Fine-Grained Networks and Connect Major Spaces

Staff Response

The study recommends introducing more areas for public congregation and redeveloping laneways in the study area. Transportation Services currently has a laneway rehabilitation program but its purpose is to maintain laneways in a state of good repair rather than enhance the streetscape with upgraded materials and the like. City Planning has used its modest capital budget to improve some laneways and planning projects. City Planning supports improved laneway conditions and attempts to secure these improvements as part of the development approvals process where appropriate, for example, the laneway adjacent to 155 Dundas Street East (proposed PACE residential condominium project) and St. Enoch's Square adjacent to 197 Yonge Street (proposed MOD residential condominium project).

Greenberg/KPMB Recommendation 7: Street Lighting

Staff Response

The study recommends the implementation of innovative street lighting projects and potentially reducing the number of light standards in the right-of-way. The DYBIA has their own streetscape guidelines that the City of Toronto requires developers to comply with. Any changes to the lighting of Yonge Street would have to be conducted in consultation with the DYBIA.

Greenberg/KPMB Recommendation 8: Retaining the Heritage Envelope

Staff Response

Yonge Street is currently in the process of being nominated for as a Heritage Conservation District (HCD), however the boundaries of the study will not include the area between Gerrard Street and Dundas Street. Furthermore, an HCD would not be an appropriate tool in this case as there is not a consistent heritage character along Yonge Street between Gerrard Street and Dundas Street. Heritage Staff are cognizant of the

backlog in listing and designating new buildings due to low staffing levels in Heritage Preservation Services, and will be tendering a request for proposals to list outstanding buildings in the heritage inventory.

Greenberg/KPMB Recommendation 9: Built Form, Distribution of Programs and Land-Use

Staff Response

Zoning

Greenberg/KPMB study concluded that the City of Toronto should amend zoning by-law 438-86 (as amended) to remove the angular plane on Yonge Street and replace it with a blanket 7.5 metre stepback from the property line with heights to be increased from 20 metres to 30 metres in sections along Yonge Street. The angular plane is measured 44 degrees from the Yonge Street property line at a height of 16 metres, and is based on a study titled: "Sun, Wind, and Pedestrian Comfort: A Study of Toronto's Central Area" by Bosselmann et. al. The study was commissioned by the City of Toronto and published in 1990 as a joint study by the Centre for the Built Environment at UC Berkeley and the University of Toronto.

In addition to this elimination of the angular plane, the Greenberg/KPMB study further proposes that the City amend the Zoning By-law to permit a tower at the southeast corner of Gerrard Street East and Yonge Street of 107 metres (approximately 33 storeys), to allow a targeted density and height increase to preserve the historic character of the remainder of Yonge Street between, Gerrard Street and Dundas Street. City Staff have analyzed the recommendations with built form and GFA modeling.

In discussions with Mr. Greenberg, the intent of the zoning change was to set any future development back from the heritage envelope providing a greater reveal to the heritage building than is currently required by the zoning by-law. The increased heights were provided as an incentive for any future development to preserve the underlying heritage fabric.

City Planning Staff concur with the conclusions of the Greenberg/KPMB study, however, Staff have during the last two years achieved a 10 to 20 metre stepback from heritage properties on Yonge Street. The new Downtown Tall Buildings Study Report also requires a step back of 20 metres as an appropriate condition for any development above a heritage building on Yonge Street.

There may be merit in enshrining a stepback with a small height increase in the zoning by-law but it should be applied along a greater length of Yonge Street than between Gerrard Street and Dundas Street, and should be consistently applied. Mr. Greenberg has suggested that a phased implementation of a stepback could be appropriate while City Planning Staff study the implications of a blanket stepback along a broader stretch of

Yonge Street. Planning Staff are not recommending any change in the zoning by-law relating to the current angular plane at this time.

Retention of Fine-Grained Retail

The Greenberg/KPMB Study recommends that the Zoning By-law be amended to enshrine a 16 metre maximum frontage for a retail unit on Yonge Street at grade. Staff support the retention of fine-grained retail on Yonge Street and support limiting the maximum frontages on Yonge Street for a retail unit to approximately 16 metres. The City of Toronto recently adopted Official Plan Amendment #95 which implemented Section 3.5.3 of the Official Plan, The Future of Retailing. Policies in this section require retail units to be compatible with the prevailing character of the retail strip, and gives the City of Toronto Planning Department direction to implement site specific zoning to limit retail frontages where appropriate. There are other examples where the City has provided guidance for limited retail frontages, for example, the Bloor Street West Site Specific Policy (334) encourages fine grained retail. Likewise, urban design guidelines along Queen Street East in the Beach encourage retail bays of not more than 8 metres in width.

City Planning was successful in achieving a maximum at grade retail unit frontage of 17 metres for the Ryerson Student Learning Centre and secured it in the zoning by-law as per the direction of the Official Plan. City Planning Staff would apply similar principles for any future redevelopment.

Greenberg/KPMB Recommendation 10: Signage on Yonge

Staff Response

The Signage Vision for the Downtown Yonge, entitled: "Bright Lights, Big City", was commissioned by the DYBIA to recognize the importance of Yonge Street as a retail strip and to create a unique signage vision that took advantage of new technologies and types of signs not otherwise permitted in the City of Toronto. In 2009, City Council adopted in principle this Signage Vision. The Signage Vision provides a framework for evaluating and reviewing large-format signage applications, including third party advertising billboards. The Signage Vision applies to the Downtown Yonge "Strip"; generally along Yonge Street from Gerrard Street to Queen Street, and including a segment of Dundas Street from Dundas Square to Bay Street. Subsequently, in April 2010, a new City-wide Sign By-law came into effect, regulating all signs across the City under a harmonized by-law and replacing an outdated and inconsistent regulatory and administrative regime. Since then there have been few applications to obtain approval for large-format signs in the Signage Vision area. Greenberg/KPMB believes that the signage vision for Downtown Yonge should be abandoned as the increased signage considerations negatively impact the heritage resources in the area and undermine opportunities for the redevelopment of underutilized land.

Greenberg/KPMB Recommendation 11: Residential Target Groups

Staff Response

The study recommends that a mixed residential population be targeted that includes: students, first-time property owners, hospital staff and young families. The Official Plan contains a number of policies that encourage creating communities of mixed-income and tenure. Section 2.2.1 specifically provides direction for development within the *Downtown*. This area of Yonge Street is located within the *Downtown Area* of the Official Plan. The *Downtown* is expected to evolve as the premier employment area of the City of Toronto and provide a range of housing for those working in the area. The City will also explore opportunities to maintain and improve the public realm, promote an environment of creativity and innovation, support and enhance the specialty retail and entertainment districts, support business infrastructure and create business partnerships. City Planning as part of the development application review process seeks to achieve minimum numbers of family sized units in order to diversify the population.

Greenberg/KPMB Recommendation 12: Employment, High-Tech Incubators

Staff Response

The City's Business Incubation and Commercialization Program, works with community partners to support small business growth and development through a continuum of programs, services and resources. Economic Development and Culture (EDC) act in a facilitating role to increase the number, scale and effectiveness of business incubation activity across the City. Digital media enterprises and technology companies actively seek to locate in the downtown core, but high lease rates limit opportunities. Tools that the City could use to encourage high-tech industries to locate in the core include: leveraging City-owned land/facilities for business incubation purposes to support start-up and early stage companies, guaranteeing capital loans for non-profit organizations that support small business success through a robust business incubation program and instituting a municipal tax policy that encourages vacant properties to be reused for business incubation purposes. Business incubators are eligible for the Tax Increment Equivalent Grant (TIEG) program the City currently has in place to attract high value industries.

Greenberg/KPMB Recommendation 13 and 14: Culture & Entertainment, Music, Theatre & Digital Media, Temporary Streetscape, Vendors, Markets & Seasonal Events

Staff Response

The Economic Development and Culture, Special Events, Event Support Unit acts to facilitate cultural events and entertainment throughout the City of Toronto. Depending on the type of event(s) proposed, EDC, Event Support Unit can act in a number of different capacities including event development, logistical support or to facilitate inter-departmental and inter-governmental connections in order to make an event(s) feasible.

For example, when the Celebrate Yonge event was proposed by the DYBIA the EDC Event Support Unit acted as a facilitator with the Alcohol and Gaming Commission of Ontario, Transportation Services, as well as other City Divisions to make the event possible and to assist in procurement of the necessary permits.

Furthermore, the City of Toronto BIA Office and Downtown Yonge BIA have cost-shared almost \$5,0 million in streetscape improvements over the last 8 years. Public realm improvements such as Branded traffic poles at each intersection on Yonge, new pedestrian scale lighting, new street tree plantings, and custom bike rings, together with façade improvement grants, have all helped to brand and rejuvenate Yonge Street. The City's BIA Office will continue to consider BIA streetscape improvement funding requests in its annual capital budget preparation, particularly where such improvements can be coordinated in conjunction with other public works.

CONCLUSIONS

Yonge Street is an important cultural corridor in Toronto and acts as Canada's main street to the world. It is deserving of a strategy that leverages its assets to the fullest. City of Toronto Staff generally support the Public Realm Initiative brought forward by the DYBIA and currently act in a number of ways to implement the recommendations in the Greenberg/KPMB study. Other recommendations have strong urban planning merits and are successfully employed in other jurisdictions throughout the world, but require appropriate study and funding prior to implementation.

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Attachment 1: Summary of Study Findings

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The following is an overview of the various documents identified for review:

(a) Downtown Yonge Street Community Improvement Plan

By-law 1996-0135 was enacted March 4, 1996 designating and adopting a Community Improvement Plan (CIP) for downtown Yonge Street. The CIP was subsequently amended 7 times from 1996 to 2002. The CIP contains policies which were originally put in place to support the Yonge Dundas Redevelopment Project. Amendments to the CIP over the years adjusted the boundaries of the Plan and added the City's facade improvement grant program as an eligible benefit.

(b) Downtown Yonge BIA Streetscape Guidelines

The Downtown Yonge BIA developed Streetscape Guidelines which were published in November 2009. The guidelines provide direction on how the right-of-way should be treated within the boundaries of the BIA. The guidelines include direction on:

- street lighting;
- branded traffic poles;
- pedestrian lighting;
- details, including:
 - light pole details;
 - light fixtures;
 - branded banner programs;
 - hanging baskets;
 - branded street name signs; and
 - bicycle rings.
- tree planting, including:
 - designated tree planting areas;
 - tree planting details;
- sidewalk details; and
- the coordinated street furniture program.

(c) Downtown Yonge BIA Public Realm Strategy

The Downtown Yonge BIA developed a Public Realm Strategy which was published in June 2011. The strategy outlines desired improvements to the public realm within the BIA area. The intent of the strategy was to guide future investment in the BIA area by both private and public sector and joint initiatives.

The strategy divided the BIA area into precincts and further identified improvements within each precinct as follows:

- College/Carlton Precinct
 - St. Luke Lane Improvement Project
 - College Subway Station Stairwell Canopy Project

- Reverend Porter Lane Improvement Project
- Wood Street Sidewalk Bump-out Project
- Grenville Street Sidewalk Bump-out Project
- Parks Precinct
 - College Park Improvement Project
 - McGill Parkette Upgrade Project
 - Granby Parkette Upgrade Project
 - Mid-Block Cross-walk Project
 - McGill Dog Park Project
 - Yonge Street Median Improvement Project
- Mainstreet Precinct
 - Walton Street Project
 - O'Keefe Lane Entrance
 - Gould Street Project
 - TTC Second Entrance/Exit
- Edward/Elm Street Precinct
 - TTC Stairwell Relocation and Canopy
 - Edward Street Project
 - Edward Mid-block Cross-walk Project
 - Mid-Block Connection Project
 - Elm Street Project
 - Elm Street Mid-block Cross-walk Project
- Entertainment Precinct
 - Dundas Square Street Project
 - Laneway Site Line Improvement Project
 - Victoria Street Project at Y-D Square and City TV/OMNI TV
 - DYBIA Discovery Team Visitor Information Booth Project
- Theatre Precinct
 - Shuter Street Project
 - Queen Subway Station Stairwell Project on Yonge Street
 - O'Keefe Lane/St. Enoch's Square Improvement
 - Victoria Street Project
- Trinity Square Precinct
 - Dundas Street West Mid-Block Cross-walk/Connection Project
 - Church of the Holy Trinity Lighting Project
 - James/Albert Street Project
 - Queen Street West and Bay Street Project
 - Old City Hall Heritage Lighting Project
 - Trinity Square Park Project

(d) KPMB/Greenberg Yonge Street Study

Councillor Wong-Tam commissioned a review of the focused area on Yonge Street between Gerrard Street and Dundas Street in 2011 given changes coming to this area with the proposed Ryerson Student Learning Centre and potential redevelopment on at least two sites at Yonge Street and Gould Street, among other recent changes to Yonge Street. The study was undertaken by KPMB/Greenberg Consultants and released in July 2011.

The study made four primary recommendations:

Public Realm & Transportation

- widening sidewalks and maintaining two broad lanes of traffic on Yonge Street;
- limiting signs and billboards on heritage buildings; and
- create linkages between green spaces and pedestrian realm.

Built Form

- introducing a 7.5 m stepback for towers in place of the existing 44 degree angular plane;
- maintaining contextual heights of buildings for podiums;
- maximum permitted heights of 20 metres to 35 metres, 52 metres and 107 metres on the east side and 35 metres on the west side;
- introducing increased height permissions at Gerrard Street and Yonge Street; and
- maintaining the heritage fabric where it exists.

Program and Land Use

- maintaining the retail rhythm on Yonge Street that consists of small floorplate, fine grained retail;
- activate storefronts through the use of "garage-door" facades, French doors and open patios;
- provide a mix of use, including residential with a mix of tenure and affordability;
- encourage the return of a mix of cultural and entertainment venues; and
- allow for street vendors and markets to play an active role in revitalizing street life.

Implementation

- develop pilot projects that could be implemented immediately to enhance the streetscape and public realm;
- revise the current zoning by-law to permit intensification along with site specific design guidelines;
- provide a new subway entrance/exit at Yonge Street and Gould Street or Edward Street; and
- use capital programs to enhance the existing pedestrian networks and expand the public realm.