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DEPUTATION:

**VACANT COMMERCIAL & INDUSTRIAL TAX RELIEF PROGRAM TO STIMULATE ECONOMIC GROWTH
CITY OF TORONTO ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE – WEDNESDAY APRIL 16, 2014 – 12 NOON**

Good Afternoon,

My name is Kevin Lee. I am the Executive Director of Scadding Court Community Centre, you may know us as the home of Toronto's First Shipping Container Market—Market 707, located at 707 Dundas Street West, near Bathurst Street, opposite Toronto Western Hospital.

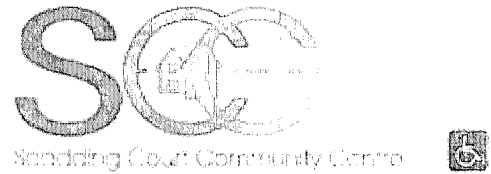
I am here today in support of the re-designing of the Vacant Commercial and Industrial Tax Relief program and to describe the continuing success we have achieved with our experience with startup enterprise incubation.

Market 707 is a business incubator established in 2011 which creates affordable start-up street-level entrepreneurial space. The Dundas Street frontage of our community centre had long been a drab desolate concrete wall with very little activity or draw for neighbouring residents or passersby. Since establishing Market 707 at this location, the street has been transformed, creating a sense of destination and vibrancy. We have also created a concept of micro-enterprise incubation which has significantly reduced the barriers to entry for business startups in the downtown core.

Market 707 currently has 17 individual business, with 11 food vendors and 6 retail and service shops. Rents to these vendors range from 11 to 26 dollars per day. With a minimal initial investment on our part we have been able to ensure the success of these micro-businesses that otherwise would not have been able to start up.

Commercial property vacancies should be perceived as opportunities to the city, not as costs. Our experience with Market 707 proves that merely by opening up such spaces, start-up businesses can thrive. Those previously unemployed, on social assistance, lacking work experience and opportunity or merely struggling financially, not only are able to find their stride, they become foundations of the city's social and economic success. Vacant commercial spaces in this way have the potential to create revenue for the city—for everyone.

It may produce many ancillary benefits for economic development policy to not merely look at the big-picture of injecting dollars into large-scale job-creation programs, but also by capitalizing on the benefit of grassroots economic development initiatives. Market 707 is a grassroots initiative and a self-sustaining project. Our initial investment in shipping container retrofits has been recouped through rental income in only a few short years, leaving a dependable stream of income flowing back into the market—to pay its own way for its administration and promotion, as well as the coordination of event programming for the surrounding community.



The success of Market 707 is well documented in the media and more and more people in Toronto are speaking about the potential of shipping container markets and what they can achieve. Last year we were profiled on Al Jazeera—a segment broadcast globally.

The accumulated learnings and expertise we have gained over the past several years, as well as the great demand we face from local community groups, NGOs, and property developers to replicate our success elsewhere has led Scadding Court Community Centre to develop a new social franchise model. Working with KPMG, we have created a concept called Business out of the Box. I will be returning to the Economic Development Committee soon to speak to this new initiative and its potential to address the availability of affordable retail space throughout Toronto.

Vibrant streets are integral to successful cities. How can vacant commercial spaces function to create opportunities to incubate start-up enterprises within such interim spaces? By working with the provincial government to amend current legislation and re-design the Vacant Commercial and Industrial Tax Relief program SCCC believes that the City will create conditions for small businesses to thrive and for communities to prosper. Thank you for your time.

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