



**STAFF REPORT
ACTION REQUIRED**

**Development of a Community/Cultural Hub in Weston
Mount Dennis – Status Report**

Date:	August 11, 2014
To:	Executive Committee
From:	General Manager, Economic Development and Culture Director, Affordable Housing Office
Wards:	Ward 11, York South-Weston
Reference Number:	

SUMMARY

For more than five years the community of Weston Mount Dennis has championed the need for re-investment and revitalization as an important way to address the many challenges in this Neighbourhood Improvement Area.

The City has also supported this work through a number of initiatives, including the commissioning of a feasibility study on a cultural/creative hub prepared by Toronto Artscape, hosting a Design Charrette in the community and the Toronto Parking Authority (the "TPA") issuing a For Sale by Expression of Interest (EOI) for the sale of 22 John Street to accommodate a pedestrian bridge over the Georgetown South rail corridor/Union-Pearson Air-Rail Link.

The sale would also support the proposed redevelopment of the surface parking lot at 22 John Street with housing, replacement municipal parking facility, a farmers' market and a cultural hub.

This report provides an update on the proposed development of the Weston Mount Dennis Community/Cultural Hub and artist live/work space, particularly the results of the Toronto Parking Authority Expression of Interest (the "Proposal"). This report requests that City staff conduct the necessary due diligence and report to Council in early 2015 on the City resources and support, including funding, which would be required to proceed with the Proposal.

RECOMMENDATION

The General Manager, Economic Development and Culture and the Director, Affordable Housing Office recommend that:

1. City Council request City staff to conduct the necessary due diligence on the Weston Mount Dennis Community/Cultural Hub Proposal and report to Council in early 2015 on City and third-party resources, including funding, which would be required to proceed with the Proposal.

Financial Impact

This recommendation will have no financial impact at this time beyond what has already been approved in the current year's budget. Staff will report in early 2015 on the financial commitment which would be required of the City to participate in this initiative and sources of funding, including third-party contributions.

The Deputy City Manager and Chief Financial Officer has reviewed this report and agrees with the financial impact information.

DECISION HISTORY

In August 2009, City Council adopted the *Housing Opportunities Toronto - An Affordable Housing Action Plan 2010-2020*, and in which Recommendation 48 directed the City to:

Attract and retain artists and other creative workers in Toronto by:

- a. Encouraging the creation of affordable commercial live/work studios to foster the development of Creative Toronto.
- b. Working with providers of affordable housing to increase the amount of space available to artists.
- c. Working with providers of affordable housing to ensure that small non-profit commercial space be created alongside or integrated into new projects to increase business opportunities and renew streams for housing projects and residents.

This report can be viewed at:

<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2009.EX33.47>

In July 2010, during consideration of the report *Tower Renewal City Wide Implementation*, City Council directed the Project Director, Tower Renewal Office to work with the Chief Planner and Executive Director, City Planning, the Executive Director, Social Development, Finance and Administration, the General Manager, Economic Development and Culture and other divisions as required to assess the opportunities in the Weston and Mount Dennis area to apply tower renewal concepts.

This report can be viewed at:

<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2010.EX45.52>

In May 2011, City Council adopted the report *Creative Capital Gains: An Action Plan for Toronto*, which tabled a report on behalf of Toronto's Creative Capital Advisory Council, a volunteer council co-chaired by the Chair, Economic Development Committee and leaders in business, the creative industries, and not-for-profit arts community. This report makes a set of recommendations to the City of Toronto designed to enhance Toronto's place as a leading international cultural centre and to increase the role of culture in the economic and social development of the City. Its recommendation included: "3.2 - *Support the development of the Cultural/Creative Hub in Weston Mount Dennis and use it to showcase the community's history.*"

This staff report and accompanying Advisory Council report can be viewed at:

<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2011.ED3.3>

In March 2012, City Council adopted the report *Weston 2021 Revitalization Strategy - Request for Direction Report*, which provided a summary and update on City and agency initiatives in the Weston community. Further, it recommended that Council endorse the revitalization approach and the establishment of an inter-divisional implementation team to coordinate the revitalization initiatives in the community of Weston. In particular, the report described the significant efforts by the community, stakeholders and staff in supporting this initiative, including the Weston Design Charrette held during 2011, the work of the not-for-profit Urban Land Institute (ULI) Technical Assistance Panel in bringing expertise in the real estate, planning and development fields to collaborate on complex land use and redevelopment projects, and Artscape in developing the Feasibility Study for a Cultural/Creative Hub in Weston Mount Dennis.

This report, together with the work of the stakeholders can be viewed at:

<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2012.EY13.3>

In December 2013, City Council authorized the sale of part of 22 John Street (near Weston Road and Lawrence Avenue) to accommodate a pedestrian bridge over the Georgetown South rail corridor/Union-Pearson Air-Rail Link at the John Street location as well as to support redevelopment of the surface parking lot at 22 John Street, which includes a residential component, replacement municipal parking facility, a Farmer's Market and a Cultural Hub.

This report can be viewed at:

<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2013.GM26.17>

ISSUE BACKGROUND

Planning for the revitalization of the Weston Mount Dennis Neighbourhood Improvement Area began more than five years ago. More than one hundred stakeholders participated in the Weston Design Charrette, which provided direction into the development of the *Weston 2021 Revitalization Strategy-Request for Direction Report*. This report outlined the benefits of a cultural hub, along with live/work spaces for artists, studio space, community space and a farmers' market.

Through this work, a number of key opportunities continue to emerge. They include:

- Enthusiastic, engaged and active community members and networks with a strong desire to see something happen.
- Engaged and active young people with a strong desire to participate and contribute.
- A strong and determined project champion in the local City Councillor.
- Significant new development and a range of development opportunities.
- Potential development sites in accessible locations.
- Expansion of Urban Arts (a local not-for-profit community arts council focusing on enhancing neighbourhoods by engaging youth through the arts) indicates high demand and need for creative/cultural facilities/services.
- In total, a variety of promising opportunities for more social inclusion and economic revitalization.

COMMENTS

Given City Council's direction to hold the proceeds in Community Development Reserve Fund (XR3100) from the sale of part of the Toronto Parking Authority's lot at 22 John Street to support redevelopment of the surface parking lot which includes a residential component, replacement municipal parking, a farmers' market and a cultural hub, the TPA undertook a process to secure a development partner for the area that would include a community/cultural hub and relocation of the Metrolinx station.

In August 2012, the TPA issued *The Development Opportunity – 16 John Street in the Historic Village of Weston – For Sale By Expression of Interest (EOI)*, prepared by Lennard Commercial Realty.

Through the EOI, the Rockport Group was chosen as the developer. To achieve its vision for the community, Rockport's proposal includes Woodburn Capital (owners of the adjoining apartment building at 33 King Street) and Toronto Artscape as active participants. TPA has signed an agreement of purchase and sale with 22 John Street Developments Inc., owned by Rockport, which is conditional upon TPA board and City Council approval.

A development proposal for this site prepared by the Rockport Group has been preliminarily reviewed by City staff for the purpose of this report; however, a development application has yet to be filed with the City. In its current form, the proposal is comprised of four components:

- A community/cultural centre (800 square meters) in the vacant first level of the apartment building at 33 King Street;
- 24 affordable artist live/work rental units in part of the vacant first level of 33 King Street;
- An outdoor area for a farmers' market (2,000 square meters); and
- A purpose-built, market rental apartment building containing approximately 300 units at 22 John Street with parking accommodated at 33 King Street.

There are a number of aspects of the Proposal that require the City's consideration and which call upon the City for assistance to allow the parties to finalize the transaction. These include provisions for a replacement public parking lot, declaring the 22 John Street property surplus to the City's needs, planning approvals, operations issues and funding for individual public initiatives.

This report recommends that City staff conduct the necessary due diligence and report to Council in early 2015 on the level of City commitment, including City and potential third-party funding, which would be required to bring the Proposal to a successful conclusion.

CONCLUSION

The Weston Mount Dennis Community/Cultural Hub and artist live/work space is a cutting edge initiative which is at the forefront of revitalizing a historic and important part of Toronto.

The Toronto Parking Authority has advanced the development of the community/cultural hub through the completion of an Expression of Interest process.

Upon adopting this report, City staff will conduct the necessary due diligence and report to Council in early 2015 on the level of City commitment and support, including City and potential third-party funding, which would be required to proceed with the Proposal.

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