



WOODBINE HEIGHTS ASSOCIATION

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SENT BY ELECTRONIC MAIL: mpyjor@toronto.ca

Magosha Pyjor
Senior Public Consultation Co-ordinator
City of Toronto

Dear Ms. Pyjor,

re: Protected Bicycle Lanes on Woodbine Avenue and O'Connor Bridge

The Woodbine Heights Association represents residents, supporters and business-owners of the Woodbine Heights neighbourhood, centred on Woodbine Avenue, and bounded by Coxwell, Danforth, Main, O'Connor Drive and Taylor Creek. We support **continuous, separated and protected bicycle lanes along Woodbine Avenue**, not just because they promote cycling safety, but because they are essential for the revival of our commercial "main street": Woodbine Avenue. Protected bicycle lanes and substantially increased bicycle traffic on Woodbine Avenue will go a long way towards ameliorating the injuries inflicted on our once-healthy pedestrian commercial strip by a series of bad municipal traffic and land use planning decisions.

It is important to remember that our stretch of Woodbine Avenue is the heart of the Woodbine Heights neighbourhood, rather than just a high-speed through-route for motorists headed downtown. Woodbine has the right "bones" to be a vibrant and successful main street.

- The area between Danforth and Barker Avenue, in particular, developed well before World War II (ca 1920) as a complete, pedestrian-oriented commercial main street for the Woodbine Heights neighbourhood.
- Much of the street is zoned commercial, and most of Woodbine is designated as a "main street" in Toronto's streetscape manual. It has many of the same narrow lots, sidewalk-hugging storefronts, and mature buildings that characterize Toronto's most vibrant streets.
- Well into the latter half of the 20th century, the Woodbine offered everything from a movie theatre and hardware store, pharmacy, and egg market to multiple competing greengrocers, dry-cleaners, ice-cream parlours, and restaurants.

Letter of Support for Bicycle Lanes on Woodbine Avenue and O'Connor Bridge

Woodbine Avenue continues to offer important shops and services, including hair-dressers, dry cleaners, a cafe, some restaurants, and even a tattoo artist. Unfortunately, thanks in large part to a long string of bad urban and transportation planning decisions, many other storefronts on the Woodbine are presently vacant, derelict, or occupied as makeshift residential units. Our street shifted into decline in concert with the widening of the asphalt surface, the narrowing of sidewalks, the proliferation of on-site parking and curb cuts in adjacent residential areas, and the conversion of the street into a high-speed motor-vehicle thoroughfare. Participants in a recent discussion group organized by the Woodbine Heights Association identified the following design issues, alongside inadequate employment uses, as fundamental to our difficulties.

- The narrow sidewalks on Woodbine Avenue, together with the absence of any effective buffer against motor vehicle traffic can make Woodbine Avenue feel like an unpleasant, and even unsafe place to walk. As a consequence many people who might walk down Woodbine en route to the Subway (frequenting local cleaners or coffee shops on the way) use less-direct side-streets instead. Even parents with homes fronting onto Woodbine are sometimes reluctant to let their kids walk unaccompanied. The sidewalks are now too narrow in most places to accommodate sidewalk planters, which function as psychological barriers on other main streets.
- While Woodbine Avenue is an important route for cyclists, many people who would prefer to commute by bicycle along Woodbine and stop at local shops and services, are deterred from cycling by the prospect of having to negotiate space with fast-moving motorists. There have been a number of accidents. Motorists consistently fail to change lanes or leave sufficient space when passing cyclists, and cyclists who ride outside the gutter (to avoid obstacles and parked cars and improve visibility) often face abuse and harassment. Woodbine does not presently feel like an entirely safe route for children travelling to school, sports, or the beach.
- Independent shops and restaurants on Woodbine receive relatively little business from passing motorists. This is consistent with what we might expect based on customer surveys in other neighbourhoods: fast-moving motorists are simply less inclined than pedestrians and cyclists to stop and shop. However the phenomenon is particularly stark here because on-street parking is *prohibited* during the hours when most motorists are passing by.
- Retail uses on Woodbine have declined to the extent that there is now a substantial gap from one operating storefront to another. This worsens the situation even further because a commercial street requires a high density of destinations in order to attract shoppers and passers-by.

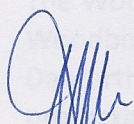
We support protected bicycle lanes and increased cycling traffic on Woodbine because they will remove many of the main obstacles to cleaning up Woodbine and revive it as a full-service neighbourhood main street.

- First, protected bicycle lanes on Woodbine will create a much-needed spatial buffer and physical barrier between pedestrians and fast-moving motorists that will mitigate the feeling of danger and discomfort on the sidewalk. The biggest benefit would come from a design which uses a combination of installed bollards, posts, etc. and permanent parking on one side of the street as a barrier between cyclists and motor vehicles. Street parking by itself does not provide the needed barrier because it is presently prohibited during the morning and evening hours with highest pedestrian demand, and because parked vehicles are sparse during the business hours when they are permitted.
- Second, protected bike lanes along Woodbine, and on the bridge connecting Woodbine and O'Connor, will attract new cyclists (i.e., customers) who are too intimidated to ride in mixed traffic. We are optimistic that Woodbine will become a preferred route for cyclists commuting downtown, to the subway, or to Danforth. Further, given the changing demographics of our neighbourhood, we are excited at the prospect of making Woodbine a safe and comfortable place for children and young people to ride their bikes to the beach and neighbourhood activities.
- Third, protected bike lanes, with associated bicycle parking and increases in cycling traffic will help compensate for the tendency of motorists to simply speed past without visiting local shops. Studies in other Toronto neighbourhoods suggests cyclists are much more likely than motorists to stop and frequent main street business, and bicycle parking (unlike car parking) will be available to let customers stop in throughout the day, including during the morning and afternoon commutes. We would anticipate some further benefits if the city were to proceed with a design that allowed all hours motor vehicle parking a barrier between cyclists and moving vehicles on one side of the street.
- Fourth, we are optimistic that bike lanes will function as sutures, knitting together the gaps in Woodbine's commercial strip created by storefronts that are presently vacant or occupied residentially, and creating a customer base that will help attract new commercial occupants. Gaps which feel like "dead zones" at a walking pace have less of an impact on somewhat faster-moving cyclists. We are impressed by the way that bike lanes have energized commerce on streets like Harbord Avenue, which have a scale and spacing of commercial uses that is similar that of occupied storefronts on Woodbine.

Finally, it is important to state we are satisfied, having reviewed draft designs for the Woodbine project (dated May 27, 2016), that they would not have significant adverse effects on travel times, transit, motor vehicle congestion, or the availability of adequate parking in our neighborhood. In addition to providing street parking during key periods when it is currently prohibited, the plan provides roughly enough parking to accommodate even the maximum recorded parking demand along Woodbine. Moreover, the plan manages to accommodate *all* existing motor traffic alongside cyclists and pedestrians by making more efficient use road space that is currently wasted.

We know that bike lanes and streetscape improvements are not a panacea. Realizing our visions for Woodbine will take hard work and policies to address less tangible issues, such as a shortage of daytime employment in the neighbourhood. However, we have a strong and active community. By addressing, or at least mitigating some otherwise intractable problems, protected, continuous bike lanes on Woodbine will provide us the opening we need. We are confident our engaged residents, volunteers and entrepreneurs will take us the rest of the way.

Yours truly,



James Ward

Chair & Membership Officer
Woodbine Heights Association

on behalf of the Woodbine Heights Association

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