



TO: Chair Wong-Tam and members of the Toronto & East York Community Council

FROM: Walk Toronto (Steering Committee)

RE: TE:21.1 - Bloor Corridor/Annex Block Planning Study Official Plan Amendment - Final Report

DATE: Jan. 16, 2017

Walk Toronto is a grassroots, volunteer pedestrian advocacy group that works to improve walking conditions and pedestrian safety in Toronto.

Bloor Street is one of Toronto's two principal streets. Expensive improvements to the pedestrian realm, such as sidewalk widening, have been undertaken on the section of Bloor between Church St. and Avenue Road. Unfortunately, far less progress has occurred on the section between St. George St. and Walmer Road – even though various recommendations have been made in the Bloor Corridor Visioning Study (adopted by Council in 2009), and to a lesser extent by the Bloor bike lane pilot project (currently in progress).

Because progress has been lagging over the last few years, we welcome the proposed amendments outlined in the Nov. 30, 2016 staff report for the St. George to Walmer section.

MID-BLOCK CONNECTIONS & POPS

As part of the design of new developments, we encourage the creation of mid-block connections to Matt Cohen Park and Paul Martel Park. This will result in the Bloor/ Spadina node becoming more 'porous' for pedestrians. It will also make the local parks more accessible for pedestrians in an area that is poorly provisioned with green space.

We would like to see TARTU College include a mid-block connection to the POPS public square proposed for the rear of the college, near 9 and 11 Madison Ave. It is essential that both the POPS and the pedestrian connection have adequate signage in order to make it clear that the public is welcome to use this public space.

WIDENED SIDEWALKS

The staff report does not go into detail about the policy of widening sidewalks. As new towers are built in the vicinity of Bloor St. between St. George St. and Walmer Rd., pedestrian traffic will increase. People wanting to walk east/ west in the study area have few alternatives to Bloor. Neither Lowther Ave. (the nearest continuous street to the north) nor Harbord St. (the nearest to the south) are especially close to Bloor St. It is therefore essential that new developments on Bloor be set back from the street, the space to be used to widen sidewalks.

TOWER SEPARATION

Walk Toronto supports a minimum tower separation of 25 metres. Staff note that opting for a narrower tower separation standard will create a canyon-like block typology that will create unpleasant pedestrian-level wind conditions. We might add that it will also block sunlight on Bloor St. in the summer during early morning and in the evening. Moreover, some local side streets and parks to the north of Bloor will also be cast in the shade if tower separation is tighter.

ACCESSIBILITY

If bike lanes on this part of Bloor St. become permanent, both the City and private developers should ensure that proper provision is made for the pick-up and drop-off of people with disabilities by motor vehicle. The principles of Universal Design should be adhered to. This could include building accessible lay-bys that conform to either the mid-block floating island design, or an intersection corner design. Furthermore, new private developments should include an accessible pick-up/ drop-off zone on their property so that the public right-of-way is not impeded by loading and unloading operations.

It is equally important to ensure that entrances to buildings are accessible for people with disabilities. Even a single step can act as a barrier, and so these should be eliminated in entrance designs. New developments can be made barrier-free either by incorporating accessible ramps or by designing entrances so they are at sidewalk grade. Because most of the built form within the study area is institutional, there are not many retail businesses – but those which still have inaccessible entrances should be encouraged to provide some sort of accommodation, even if this simply means putting in a StopGap ramp.

When new developments are being constructed, hoarding and scaffolding should be minimized, and the pedestrian clearway should be easy for people using mobility devices to navigate.

PUBLIC REALM

We also encourage investment in other pedestrian improvements to the public realm. These would include more: benches, public art, street trees, and flowers; better way-finding; etc.

Michael Black and Adam Cohoon

Walk Toronto