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City Councillor | Ward 20, Trinity-Spadina

June 21, 2018

Economic Development Committee
Committee Room 1, City Hall
100 Queen Street West
Toronto ON M5H 2N2

Re: Renewing Canada's Walk of Fame as a celebration and a destination

Dear Chair and Members,

Canada's Walk of Fame

Canada's Walk of Fame celebrates Canadians who have excelled in their respective fields in order to engage and to inspire the next generation. 173 Canadians have been inducted since 1998 and they are commemorated by stars displayed in the sidewalk along King Street West and Simcoe Street in the Entertainment District. In recent years Canada's Walk of Fame has expanded its ambitions to include programs that help create a new generation of star Canadians, and to strengthen national ties with "hometown stars" in cities across Canada.

John Street Cultural Corridor

The John Street Cultural Corridor is recognized as a route of civic and cultural importance in Toronto, encompassing major facilities and institutions including the Art Gallery of Ontario, the CBC Broadcast Centre, the Princess of Wales and Royal Alexandra Theatres, TIFF Bell Lightbox, and Roy Thomson Hall to name just a few. City Council, in considering plans and studies of this area, has designated John Street as a "Cultural Corridor," an "Avenue of the Arts," and a "Pedestrian Priority Route."

Recognizing and in keeping with these designation, the City completed an Environmental Assessment for the John Street Cultural Corridor with the primary objective of developing a unique and high quality streetscape design that provides a safe and vibrant environment for pedestrians. Over the past few years, City staff have worked hard with project partners, including the Toronto Entertainment District BIA, to complete detailed design work and a phasing implementation plan. Construction to relocate underground utilities for the project started in spring 2018 with the first phase of surface improvements to follow seamlessly after.

The new pedestrian-focused design of John Street will have greatly-expanded sidewalks, fewer lanes of traffic and curbs that will be removed so there is no fixed barrier between the pavement and pedestrian realm. The design envisions a street that is regularly closed to traffic for cultural events, but even under regular operation it will be a slow-moving narrow street where all road users can safely interact. It will become a signature Toronto street, attractive to locals and visitors alike.

John Street Square

Several years ago, the Toronto Entertainment District BIA identified the south-east corner of John Street and King Street West as an underutilized but prime parcel of land that presents a major opportunity to expand the public realm in this busy, crowded district. A design competition in 2010 elicited several creative and interesting proposals for improving the corner. Since then, a number of conversations with stakeholders and potential partners have started regarding creating a "John Street Square" on the corner but so far none have reached an advanced stage, in part because the land for John Street Square sits partly on top of a private parking garage that will be due for roof repairs in the medium-term future.

Opportunity with Canada's Walk of Fame

Canada's Walk of Fame is interested in partnering with the City of Toronto and the Toronto Entertainment District BIA to improve the legibility and attractiveness of the physical "walk" by potentially relocating the commemorative stars to John Street and creating a symbolic heart for Canada's Walk of Fame at John Street Square. It might accommodate ceremonial activities with new inductees and serve an interpretive function for visitors, while on a typical day for most people it would be viewed as simply an expansion of the John Street Cultural Corridor's public and pedestrian realm.

It is an opportune time to consider the possibility of relocating the stars to John Street now that detailed design of the below-grade elements is complete and construction is underway, so we have some time to consider incorporating the stars into the surface paving treatment. And the idea of creating a symbolic heart for Canada's Walk of Fame could serve as the catalyst to build John Street Square and make the most of the public lands on this corner.

Recommendation:

1. Request the General Manager, Economic Development and Culture, to work with Canada's Walk of Fame, the Toronto Entertainment District BIA, and relevant City staff to explore opportunities together to incorporate Canada's Walk of Fame stars into the design of the John Street Cultural Corridor and to create a symbolic heart for Canada's Walk of Fame as part of a revitalized public space on the south-east corner of John Street and King Street West.

Sincerely,

Joe Cressy
City Councillor
Ward 20, Trinity-Spadina