



Proposal for the Implementation of a Temporary Public Art Installation: Illuminating and Animating University Avenue

Date: October 8, 2019

To: Executive Committee

From: Interim Director, Toronto Office of Partnerships

Wards: 10 & 11

SUMMARY

The purpose of this report is to request that City Council approve the implementation of Phase One of a potential multi-phase initiative to illuminate and animate University Avenue, which will require coordinated efforts and ongoing support from City staff.

The City of Toronto received an unsolicited proposal from a citizen-led organization called the Friends of University Avenue. The proposal includes three phases of enhancements to University Avenue. Phase One would include the implementation of a temporary public art installation, funded through philanthropic contributions at the intersection of University Avenue and Gerrard Street. The proposed public art installation is internally lit and its intent is to illuminate the Avenue as a 'beacon of light and hope'. Phase Two would include enhanced landscaping and year round illumination of existing monuments. Phase Three would include a curated program of rotating public art, commissioned or loaned by Friends of University Avenue. At this time, approval is only sought for Phase One.

A Steering Committee, comprised of the Friends of University Avenue and representatives from City Divisions including City Planning, Economic Development and Culture, Transportation Services, and Parks Forestry and Recreation, has been established to assess the feasibility of implementing this public art installation on University Avenue. City staff support the project in principle and, with City Council support, will continue to collaborate with the Friends of University Avenue with the aim of realizing the temporary public art installation. City staff are working through issues related to the proposed project to ensure that all of the City's requirements are met. This report summarizes these issues and the recommended actions that have been identified by staff, including but not limited to protecting heritage views, Phase One installation, and preparing a Memorandum of Understanding for the Friends of University Avenue and the City to enter into.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Interim Director, Toronto Office of Partnerships recommends that:

1. City Council authorize the Interim Director, Toronto Office of Partnerships, in coordination with the General Manager, Economic Development and Culture, General Manager, Transportation Services, the Chief Planner & Executive Director, City Planning, and the General Manager Parks, Forestry & Recreation to negotiate and sign a Memorandum of Understanding with the Friends of University Avenue regarding the implementation of Phase One on terms satisfactory to the City Solicitor.
2. City Council authorize the General Manager, Transportation Services to negotiate and sign an encroachment agreement with the Friends of University Avenue and/or its partners on terms satisfactory to the General Manager, Transportation Services and in a form satisfactory to the City Solicitor.
3. City Council authorize the General Manager, Transportation Services to administer the provision of the necessary permits and approvals to proceed with Phase One of the Project, subject to all requirements of the General Manager, Transportation Services being satisfied.
4. City Council request the Friends of University Avenue and/or the Friends of University Avenue Steering Committee submit the proposed temporary public art installation to the Toronto Public Art Commission for review and comment.

FINANCIAL IMPACT

Phase One of the proposed initiative is to be fully funded by the Friends of University Avenue by philanthropic contributions. The Friends of University Avenue has estimated the cost of this initial phase of the project to be \$675,000, including contingencies. The initiative will only proceed once the necessary funding has been raised and agreements signed by the Friends of University Avenue and/or their partners.

Phases Two and Three proposed by the Friends of University Avenue will include capital and operational costs for the City. The financial implications to Parks, Forestry and Recreation cannot be determined until they undertake further assessment of the current state of the University Avenue median park infrastructure. The assessment information will be used to inform the future budget submissions relating to the scope of capital improvements and state of good repair needs. This work will be integrated as part of the Downtown Parks and Public Realm Implementation Strategy to consider a feasibility study to assess a potential redesign of University Avenue.

Components of Phase Three will include operational impacts to Economic Development and Culture's operating budget. Financial implications for Phase Three are not part of the considerations of this report.

Any future funding requirements will be included as part of Operating and Capital Budget submissions for consideration by Council during future Budget processes.

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

DECISION HISTORY

At its meeting of May 22, 2018, City Council adopted the Downtown Parks and Public Realm Plan and directed staff to develop a Downtown Parks and Public Realm Implementation Strategy in light of the City's broader Capital Plan. The TOcore: Downtown Official Plan Amendment was adopted at the same meeting.
<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2018.PG29.5>

COMMENTS

Background

University Avenue is Downtown's most significant ceremonial street linking the Ontario Legislature at Queen's Park to Union Station at Front Street.

In the early 1960's, when the construction of the subway was complete, the landscape architecture firm Dunington-Grubb & Stensson was commissioned to design the central medians of University Avenue. The design has been described as one of the most significant – and overlooked – modernist works of civic landscape architecture in Toronto. Yet, it has been widely recognized that it was designed as form first, then as spaces for humans to occupy second. Today, University Avenue's iconic yet isolated garden islands attract remarkably few visitors in the heart of a densifying Downtown.

University Avenue is lined with many of Toronto's most important institutions including the cluster of hospitals in the Health Sciences District, Osgoode Hall and the new Court House. The street is also a hub of commerce, with a number of landmark commercial office buildings located along this corridor. To many, University Avenue is known for its "hospital row", where a high concentration of major hospitals and research institutions can be found.

Between Queen Street West and College Street, there are several memorials, statues, gardens, and fountains located on the landscaped median which divides the northbound and southbound lanes. Not surprisingly then, University Avenue has been a destination for various events and celebrations such as the recent Raptors championship parade, which was attended by millions of fans, many of whom lined up along this boulevard.

In the TOcore study, the Downtown Plan (OPA 406) and the Downtown Parks and Public Realm Plan, University Avenue is identified as one of twelve Great Streets. The Great Streets are described as destinations in and of themselves and are recognized for their city-wide and civic importance as well as their cultural and historical significance. The Plans prioritize public realm improvements on the Great Streets and provide direction for improvements to create a unified streetscape while reinforcing the identity, distinct characteristics and heritage value and attributes of the streets.

While efforts have been made to enliven and beautify the space (e.g. festive lights illuminate the trees and shrubs of the median during the holiday season), there has been a long-standing opinion that Toronto's most ceremonial boulevard needs a refresh.

Friends of University Avenue Proposal

Recognizing the need for, and the value of, a rejuvenated University Avenue, a group of civic-minded residents and organizations (the Friends of University Avenue) has brought forward a proposal to help transform University Avenue into a "Beacon of Light". The project is intended to inspire residents, workers, visitors and patients to experience and engage with culture, health and wellness, education and innovation. The proposal includes three phases of enhancements to University Avenue. A brief description of all three phases is included below, however, this report is only seeking approval to move forward with Phase One at this time.

Phase One

In the first phase, an illuminated temporary art installation would be suspended above the median, just north of the intersection of University Avenue and Gerrard for two years. This work of temporary public art is proposed to be tethered to two or three of the neighbouring hospital buildings: Toronto General, SickKids and Mount Sinai. It will become a focal point of University Avenue, especially at night.

University Avenue, being home to the Canada Opera Company and the National Ballet of Canada, has been called "an Avenue of the Arts" and the suspended installation is intended to augment the boulevard's reputation as a cultural destination. This project proposes to illuminate the night sky between the adjacent hospitals and bring light, hope and inspiration to thousands of staff and patients whenever they peer out from their rooms, particularly during Toronto's cold and dark winter months. The Friends of University Avenue have estimated the cost of this initial phase of the project to be \$675,000, including contingencies.

Phase Two

Future enhancements to University Avenue proposed by the Friends of University Avenue include enhanced landscaping and year-round illumination of monuments, trees and plantings along the University Avenue median park. The enhanced landscaping also proposes to install additional seating and planters within the median park.

Phase Three

Phase Three of the Friends of University Avenue's proposal is a curated program of changing public art, commissioned or loaned. This program envisions a collaboration between the Friends of University Avenue, the City and some of its key arts and educational institutions to bring cultural events to the area.

City staff support the project in principle, recognizing that this will be a significant undertaking. City staff are therefore working through issues related to the proposed project to ensure that all of the City's requirements are met. The next section, summarizes issues that have been identified by staff, including but not limited to protecting heritage views, Phase One installation, and preparing a Memorandum of Understanding for the Friends of University Avenue and the City to enter into.

Issues

To support the project as proposed, staff have identified the following matters to be addressed:

View of the Queen's Park Legislature Assembly

The heritage policies of the Official Plan not only promote the preservation of important heritage buildings and structures but also the public views of them for the enjoyment of Torontonians. The view of the Queen's Park Legislature Assembly is identified on Map 7b of the Official Plan.

Protection of the view to the Queens Park Legislature Assembly originates at Queen Street West and travels northward up University Avenue from the public realm. The policy includes the prevention of any further intrusions visible above and behind the building silhouette, as well as protecting the view to the building from any further obstruction. Further information about the protected view can be found in section 3.1.5, policies 44 – 46 of the Toronto Official Plan.

The proposed temporary public art installation is approximately 8.8m x 5.5m and is within the view corridor of the Legislature Assembly. The proposed scale of the art installation, associated cable support system, height of installation, level of illumination and day-time transparency, will have an impact on the view corridor. The Friends of University Avenue will therefore be required to be flexible with the scale, height, method of installation and general design of the piece of public art to demonstrate to City staff (through visual renderings and 3-D modelling) that the impact on the view corridor has been minimized. Given the temporary nature of the installation, it is important to note that any potential impact on the view corridor will be limited to a two year period.

Phase One Installation

Transportation Services is working with the Friends of University Avenue with respect to the requirements necessary to make a formal application for Phase One of the proposed project. Potential issues with the proposal are being investigated to ensure that the installation does not pose any hazards and that it will be considered an acceptable installation within the public right of way. So far, it has been determined that Friends of University Avenue will be required to submit a Human Factors Report and a Snow and Ice Report, at minimum, prior to the consideration of the issuance of an encroachment agreement or permit, for the installation.

Memorandum of Understanding

Working in conjunction with Legal Services, the Toronto Office of Partnerships will develop a Memorandum of Understanding which will foster coordination between the parties, capture the scope of the project and clearly describe the roles and responsibilities of the Friends of University Avenue and the City. This Memorandum of Understanding will describe details including, but not limited to, the necessary permits, approvals, confirmation of funding, pertinent fundraising strategies and policies, the Friends of University Avenue's legal status, project management structure, indemnities, insurance, the cost and process of decommissioning, intellectual property rights, and a specific term. This Memorandum of Understanding will also include a request that the Friends of University Avenue submit the proposed temporary public art installation to the Toronto Public Art Commission for review and comment.

State of Good Repair

The University Avenue median is identified as a City park and requires significant reinvestment to address a range of outstanding repairs and improvements including:

- Heaving and uneven pavement to address accessibility (AODA) and health and safety concerns
- Water systems to re-enable irrigation of some horticulture beds and the ornamental fountains, of which only one is operable
- Cracking walls and foundations of planter beds and median walls
- Upgrades to existing electrical systems to address undersizing and operational outages, particularly in inclement weather
- Enhancements to the median such as the replacement of planters, seating, installation of drinking fountains and facilities that would provide for greater public use and seasonal use variations

The above work is not included in Parks, Forestry & Recreation's 2019-2028 Capital Budget and Capital Plan. A detailed capital improvement plan and cost estimate has not been prepared to evaluate the scope of capital improvements, and the corresponding funds necessary, to support increased public use along the University Avenue median park. This work was to be completed through the coordinated interdivisional implementation of the TOcore Parks and Public Realm Plan outlined in the next section of this report. Although the City supports Friends of University Avenue's initiative to enhance and celebrate this important civic landscape, further assessment of the current

state of the park infrastructure within the University Avenue median is required along with a City staff, and ultimately Council, decision around the future vision for this corridor.

Phase One of the Friends of University Avenue's proposal is not expected to require capital improvements to the segments of the University Avenue median over which the installation will be suspended. The additional enhancements proposed in Phases Two and Three, however, would increase foot traffic and public use of the median.

Coordination with the Council-Approved Downtown Parks and Public Realm Plan and Other Potential Partnerships

The implications of advancing this project beyond Phase One will also need to be evaluated in light of the broader vision for University Avenue articulated in the Downtown Parks and Public Realm Plan described in the Issue Background section of this report. When City Council adopted the Downtown Parks and Public Realm Plan on May 22, 2018, staff were directed to prepare a Downtown Parks and Public Realm Implementation Strategy and to consider the potential to prioritize a redesign of University Avenue. The Implementation Strategy is targeted for Q2 2020 and will provide future 'next steps' for reimagining University Avenue. As part of a future Feasibility Study to Redesign University Avenue, it was determined that capital investments would be required to support any future improvements. Future phases proposed by the Friends of University Avenue initiative should therefore be informed by the Downtown Parks and Public Realm Implementation Strategy.

The focus on this civic boulevard presents an opportunity for the City to write the next chapter of University Avenue in partnership with highly motivated parties, including residents and philanthropists, who have committed their time, energy and resources to this high profile public space. Any enhancement to University Avenue must align with the City's long term plan for University Avenue and the vision articulated in the Downtown Parks and Public Realm Plan. City staff will continue to work with the Friends of University Avenue to understand the nature and extent of the project's impacts, and its associated cost, in order to ensure that in-kind financial support is sustainable and facilitates the implementation of this important city-building effort.

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SIGNATURE

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ATTACHMENTS
