



## City-owned Spaces for DIY (Do-It-Yourself) Music Organizations

**Date:** February 6, 2020

**To:** Toronto Music Advisory Committee

**From:** General Manager, Economic Development and Culture

**Wards:** All

### SUMMARY

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DIY (do-it-yourself) music organizations are an important part of Toronto's music community. They annually produce hundreds of music events for artists and audiences that are under-represented in mainstream venues. However, Toronto's continued growth has created serious challenges for the long-term viability of many DIY music organizations that often operate on the financial and physical margins of the city.

The purpose of this report is to provide an initial assessment of opportunities for DIY music organizations in City-owned spaces. Economic Development and Culture staff have conducted consultations with DIY music stakeholders, a global jurisdictional review of similar programs, and discussions with City staff in Corporate Real Estate Management. The preliminary findings indicate an interest from many DIY music organizations to use City-owned spaces through a low- or no-cost agreement.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

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The General Manager, Economic Development and Culture, recommends that:

1. City Council direct the General Manager, Economic Development and Culture to work with the Executive Director, Corporate Real Estate Management to develop the terms of a pilot program for DIY (do-it-yourself) music organizations to use City-owned spaces at lower than market value, and report back to the Toronto Music Advisory Committee at their meeting in September 2020.
2. City Council direct the General Manager, Economic Development and Culture to work with the Executive Director, Corporate Real Estate Management to develop an inventory of City-owned properties suitable for tenancy by DIY (do-it-yourself) music organizations at lower than market value, and report back to the Toronto Music Advisory Committee at their meeting in September 2020.

## FINANCIAL IMPACT

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There are no immediate financial impacts arising from these recommendations.

The recommended pilot program as described in this report would result in forgone revenues to the City in future years as City-owned spaces will be provided for DIY music organizations to use at lower than market value.

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

## DECISION HISTORY

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At its meeting on November 8, 2019, the Toronto Music Advisory Committee recommended that the Economic and Community Development Committee direct the General Manager, Economic Development and Culture to consult with stakeholders in the music and arts and culture sector, as part of the work on potential do-it-yourself (DIY) venues in City-owned space.

<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2019.MA2.2>

At its meeting on October 8, 2019, the Toronto Music Advisory Committee recommended that the Economic and Community Development Committee direct the General Manager, Economic Development and Culture, in consultation with the Deputy City Manager, Corporate Services, CreateTO, and other relevant city staff, report to the Toronto Music Advisory Committee in February 2020, with an initial assessment of opportunities for DIY (do-it-yourself) venues in City-owned spaces.

<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2019.MA1.8>

At its meeting on July 16, 2019, City Council directed the General Manager of Economic Development and Culture report to the Economic and Community Development Committee on advice from nightlife and creative sector for-profit and not-for-profit enterprises, (DIY) do-it-yourself event organizers, and equity-seeking groups on best practices to enhance inclusive social culture across Toronto at night in 2020.

<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2019.EC6.8>

At its meeting on March 31, 2016, City Council adopted the Toronto Music Strategy, created by the Toronto Music Advisory Committee to guide the short- and long-term growth of Toronto's music sector.

<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2016.ED10.7>

## COMMENTS

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### **Overview: DIY Music Organizations**

Do-it-yourself (DIY) music organizations vary widely in organizational structure, as well as in the cultural or demographic communities they serve, and the genres of music they present. All DIY organizations, whether registered not-for-profits or for-profit, embrace an ethic of self-sufficiency, mastering a range of business and event production functions in order to meet their needs with limited financial resources and institutional support. Toronto's DIY music organizations operate across the city, providing opportunities for artists and audiences to build community through live music performance while generating economic activity and social vibrancy, and contributing to Toronto's cultural fabric.

DIY music organizations in general share several characteristics:

(1) They do not consistently operate in the same bricks-and-mortar properties via either ownership, leasing, or regular rentals, instead typically presenting "pop-up" performances in temporary spaces. These locations are often "alternative" spaces (i.e., those not ordinarily used for entertainment purposes) such as empty storefronts, community centres, libraries, churches, short-term rentals, condominium presentation centres, private residences, industrial buildings, or open-air locations. For many DIY organizations, the particulars of the performance space, and an audience's discovery and enjoyment of this space, are a vital element of programmed events.

(2) They program around a clearly defined artistic character or social group, which is often more integral to the organization's strategy and operations than are concerns about generating revenue. It is common to see DIY organizations focused on providing opportunities for artists and audiences from equity-seeking groups including LGBTQ2S+ communities, African, Caribbean, and Black communities, and youth. DIY music organizations engage artists and audiences drawn to genres rarely booked by most traditional Toronto venues, such as electronic dance music, hip-hop, and various global styles. Many DIY organizers, artists, and audiences feel neither welcomed nor represented in mainstream commercial music venues. As such, DIY organizers see building and nurturing community as key to their survival and relevance.

(3) They often curate events blending music with other creative disciplines such as visual art or dance, and frequently include knowledge sharing, mentorship, and advocacy in their programming and use of space.

### **The Need to Assist Toronto's DIY Music Communities**

DIY events, and those who organize and perform at them, are essential to the artistic lifeblood of Toronto's music community. These events very often provide performance opportunities to artists working in marginalized genres; and these opportunities give rise to new, vibrant styles and future stars who will continue to build Toronto's music scene and reputation as a global music centre.

There are many hundreds of DIY events each year in Toronto, including those that present music as a primary focus of performance. DIY events create welcoming spaces for diverse communities. The City of Toronto's commitment to fostering equity and inclusion aligns with supporting the existence of spaces for every kind of artistic and cultural community to gather and create art.

However, Toronto's DIY music organizations are increasingly facing serious challenges related to access to space. Most operate with minimal staffing or infrastructure and little long-term financial stability. As rising land values and gentrification in Toronto make space less available and affordable, even long-time DIY event organizers report difficulty in finding appropriate space for performances, workshops, and other activities.

Furthermore, many DIY music organizers confront difficulties in obtaining the necessary permits and approvals to run events. Frequently, DIY organizations stage events in buildings not intended or previously used for public assembly; approvals may be needed for building occupancy, fire safety, infrastructure improvement or stage construction, sale of food and alcohol, and noise exemption. Zoning or insurance may also be issues. And as DIY events are regularly planned and executed at short notice, the timelines for obtaining necessary permits from the City, and other regulators can be an obstacle to successful, efficient DIY operations.

As a result, some DIY events happen "under the radar," without the required permits and regulatory scrutiny. While holding events in this way allows DIY organizations to move quickly and nimbly in planning and executing events and to avoid permit or inspection fees, these practices can also create safety risks for performers and audiences, and potential liability risks for event organizers.

## **Consultations with DIY Stakeholders**

Recognizing the challenges facing DIY music organizations in Toronto, and understanding the interest of many DIY operators in having access to safe, suitable space for periods of up to five years' duration, the Economic Development and Culture Division through the Music Office consulted 30 DIY music event organizers in person, by telephone, and email between November 2019 and January 2020. Members of the Toronto Music Advisory Committee (TMAC) with interest or experience in DIY music also contributed suggestions during the consultations.

These consultations produced the following general conclusions:

- many DIY music organizations would highly value the stability resulting from a tenancy in a City-owned space
- a model granting DIY organizations access to the space at low cost - or at no cost - would allow them to curate events and activities that connected with their artistic or social communities without as much constant concern around revenue generation

- many DIY organizations, collaborative by nature, would be amenable to forming collectives to successfully occupy and operate a City-owned space as a DIY venue while delivering a slate of equitable and diverse programming and activities prioritized by the City

Further detail from the consultations includes the following insights:

*General location of properties:*

Properties within a grid bounded by Roncesvalles Ave on the west, Lake Ontario on the south, Parliament St on the east, and Bloor St on the north are often targeted by event organizers. Currently most of the audience for DIY music events is accustomed to attending events within this area. One event organizer specifically identified an opportunity for a DIY space in the area near Queen St E and Sherbourne St, as there are many newcomer communities in the south Regent Park region.

Stakeholders also felt that Stirling Road is potentially a good area; and further to the northwest, the areas to be served by the Eglinton Light Rail and the evolving Mount Dennis / Weston Road area could be promising. Audiences are gradually becoming more used to locations east of Broadview Ave through to Main St; and there is a growing DIY music scene in Scarborough. Finally, the daytime economic activity on Geary Avenue (a location that is evolving into a destination for DIY entrepreneurs and audiences) could be enriched by supplementary nightlife options.

*Ideal size/layout of the building:*

Audience attendance at DIY music events varies widely from 50 to 2,000 people. Therefore, several different-sized City spaces could be useful - one to accommodate up to 150 people in a performance space; one with capacity for 500, and another big enough for an audience of over 1,000.

A DIY music space might include the following: one large area for performance, including a stage, permanently installed public address and lighting systems, sound board, and other audio equipment; an adjacent area to be used for food and beverage sales; co-working space (could be a portion of the performance space, re-purposed during the daytime); and possibly smaller areas for rehearsal, recording, or meeting.

Any City-owned building considered for this program must be in a state of good repair. DIY organizations as tenants would be expected to fund or carry out minor work to optimize the space for their use (e.g., installing a stage, audio gear, bar or café equipment, painting or other decorative improvements); but major structural renovations would be outside their financial means, expertise, and capacity. Basic building infrastructure would also be required prior to occupancy: adequate / accessible washrooms, upgraded electrical power, lighting fixtures, phone / Ethernet jacks, and Wi-Fi.

*Programming models:*

Many DIY organizers agreed that a partnership or collective of smaller organizations might work well as a model in order to deliver some or all of the programming ideas listed below. An anchor organization or organizations could oversee operations of the space, including consultation with the local community, managing revenue and expenses, hiring staff, and scheduling events and activities. The space could be rented

to other DIY organizations for pop-up events a limited number of days / nights per month.

Potential programming concepts and ideas include:

- daytime and nighttime programming
- diversity, equity, inclusion, accessibility as a programming mandate, including all-ages performances
- mentorship and incubation
- opportunity for young people to form their own communities with some adult oversight
- rehearsal
- community radio station operations
- bar/cafe/restaurant operations
- community gardening
- “social mixing” - bringing people together from different walks of life

*Financial revenue models:*

DIY organizations consulted felt that the main obstacles to their current event operations are the expense of renting space and equipment, the cost and difficulty of obtaining necessary permits, and the uncertainty of being shut down by regulators. They agreed that if the City provided (at no or low cost) a secure, safe space, fully up to code, tenants could cover all annual operating costs - including staffing, event production, promotion, and minor structural improvements to the space.

*Formal assessment of interest:*

DIY organizations suggested a Request for Expressions of Interest (REOI) process to identify organizations with an interest in being considered for interim tenancy in City-owned spaces in order to deliver an agreed-on programming mandate. For the purpose of this report, interim tenancy is meant to be a period of occupancy at minimum one year and up to five years' duration, to be determined in the case of each particular property by the City of Toronto. The development of a pilot program, if approved, would define interim tenancy.

The REOI should include language encouraging creative risk-taking and cultural innovation without the necessity of guaranteeing financial success at every event, as well as promoting social mixing, and outlining inclusive programming community contributions expected of the tenants.

## **Jurisdictional Review of City Support for DIY Music Organizations**

A preliminary jurisdictional review shows that several cities worldwide have developed strategies to allow tenancy by music and/or arts organizations in City spaces.

Paris, France, has a mature program allocating City-owned space for interim tenancy by DIY music organizations. Municipal government officials in Paris, in maintaining that they bear "a responsibility to support creation," proactively match under-used City properties with DIY arts organizations. City-owned spaces in Paris currently operated by DIY arts organizations include the following:

- "La Station Gare des Mines," an unused SNCF railway coal depot presently occupied and operated by Collectif Mu, a DIY music organization
- "Les Grands Voisins," a shuttered hospital presently occupied by a multi-disciplinary coalition of DIY arts organizations including music, visual arts, artisans, and community gardens
- "Ground Control," a former rail and bus depot, completely renovated and presently occupied by DIY food, wine, and art entrepreneurs - theatre and live music are also programmed in the space

The City of Paris has maintained ownership of all the above properties (and may eventually redevelop or sell these properties). However, in the interim, the DIY organizations have transformed spaces that would otherwise be sitting empty into thriving community arts and culture hubs.

Elsewhere, Seattle, Washington's "Project Vera" operates out of the City-owned Seattle Center complex as a music incubation hub for youth. The facility hosts several performances per week and also provides recording studio and gallery space.

Sydney, Australia, operates a "Creative Space" program that makes City-owned properties available at subsidized rates to individuals and organizations working in the cultural sector, offering tenancies of varying length for live/work spaces and arts organizations. As of 2018, the program had supported 23 music and performance artists or organizations.

Attachment 1 provides more detail on the jurisdictional review of municipal support for DIY spaces.

### **Initial Assessment of Opportunities for DIY Music in City-owned Spaces**

The City of Toronto owns over 5,500 properties, worth approximately \$17 billion. Corporate Real Estate Management (CREM) is responsible for the management of these properties, and providing services such as property acquisition, appraisal, and leasing with a focus on city building and supporting City of Toronto programs and services. Some properties will be redevelopment under the purview of CreateTO. City of Toronto properties are utilized for a wide variety of purposes by a range of stakeholders. For example, there are currently 142 City-owned or managed spaces that are leased at lower than market value, either under the Community Space Tenancy policy or through historical or special lease arrangements. The City's real estate portfolio also has a number of properties that are unused or under-utilized.

Staff in Economic Development and Culture have met with staff in Real Estate Services and CreateTO staff to describe and provide context for the recommendations in this report. Real Estate Services now have information about ideal property location, description, and other details from the Music Office consultations with DIY music organizations, and staff are beginning a process of identifying possible properties for this purpose. In addition, in response to requests made by Real Estate Services and CreateTO, DIY music organizations have begun suggesting properties they believe might be desirable for DIY music tenancy.

Because of the extent of Real Estate Services' portfolio and the need to assess any properties potentially usable by DIY music organizations, developing a robust list of City-owned properties suitable for use by DIY music organizations will require a detailed analysis and coordinated effort across several City divisions and agencies.

## **Next Steps**

Developing a pilot program for DIY music organizations to use City-owned spaces will galvanize ground-breaking cross-divisional work to support a vital element of Toronto's music community, while serving the needs of equity-seeking groups across the city.

Keeping highly innovative and community-focused DIY music organizations in Toronto means addressing the pressing issues they face around affordability and access to space; and creating tenancy agreements to mitigate these challenges also serves the City's interests in optimally utilizing City-owned properties and ensuring these City assets are also seen as assets to the community.

The work outlined in this report also strengthens Toronto's position as a music- and musician-friendly city, while promoting and supporting the goals of the Toronto Music Strategy and Toronto's Nighttime Action Plan.

## **CONTACT**

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## **SIGNATURE**

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## **ATTACHMENTS**

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Attachment 1: Global Jurisdictional Review of Municipal Support for DIY Music Organizations