

City Council

Notice of Motion

MM14.8	ACTION			Ward: All
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Protecting LGBTQ2S+ Small Businesses and Cultural Space - by Councillor Kristyn Wong-Tam, seconded by Councillor Paul Ainslie

** Notice of this Motion has been given.
 * This Motion is subject to referral to the Economic and Community Development Committee. A two-thirds vote is required to waive referral.*

Recommendations

Councillor Kristyn Wong-Tam, seconded by Councillor Paul Ainslie, recommends that:

1. City Council direct the General Manager, Economic Development and Culture, in consultation with the Church-Wellesley Village Business Improvement Area, other Business Improvement Areas, TABIA and the Chief Planner and Executive Director, City Planning to develop immediate and long-term recommendations to support the retention and growth of independently owned and operated LGBTQ2S+ small businesses and cultural space.
2. City Council direct the General Manager, Economic Development and Culture to report back with the recommendations requested in Recommendation 1 above to the May 6, 2020 meeting of the Economic and Community Development Committee.
3. City Council direct the General Manager, Economic Development and Culture, as part of the report requested in Recommendation 2 above, to conduct a comprehensive review of all existing City of Toronto programs and include recommendations that can further enhance optimal conditions for LGBTQ2S+ small businesses and cultural spaces to succeed and thrive including the feasibility of creating a LGBTQ2S+ Small Business and Cultural Space Retention Program.
4. City Council request the Province of Ontario to introduce rent control legislation for commercial units to protect small to medium-sized businesses from unfair and drastic increases to their rent.

Summary

Safe, culturally significant LGBTQ2S+ independent and small businesses are in danger of closing in the gay village in Toronto and other major cities around the world. These small businesses - gathering spaces such as local cafés, eateries, pubs, bookshops and non-traditional cultural spaces such as dance clubs and the like - are vital to breaking social isolation.

In 2018, the United Way of Greater Toronto reported that 1 in 3 Canadians do not report a

strong, or very strong, sense of belonging to their local community. This statement is exacerbated in the LGBTQ2S+ communities, especially when racism, misogyny, homophobia, transphobia and other such discrimination and violence are compounded. Social isolation, particularly amongst LGBTQ2S+ youth, seniors, newcomers, and people living with disabilities is increasing and can lead to a host of physical and mental health challenges. Statistically LGBTQ2S+ communities face higher rates of depression, anxiety, suicidality, self-harm, and substance use. Rainbow Health Ontario and Canadian Mental Health Association Ontario reported that 77 percent of trans respondents in Ontario had seriously considered suicide and 45 percent had attempted suicide. Trans youth and those who had experienced physical or sexual assault were found to be at greatest risk.

This year, Glad Day Bookshop, the oldest LGBTQ2S+ bookstore in the world located in Toronto's Church-Wellesley Village is celebrating 50 years of community service. It is an accessible community hub, a tourist destination, and a host to many public events that draws visitors locally, nationally and across the globe to engage in conversations about LGBTQ2S+ culture. We are at risk of losing such unique, independently owned and operated small businesses due to the absence of commercial rent control, development speculation, and unsustainable Current Value Assessment-related tax increases. The retention and expansion of unique LGBTQ2S+ businesses should be a priority for the City of Toronto's retention of character neighbourhoods and its street-level retail strategy.

Small businesses in culturally-rich neighbourhoods from all across Toronto, such as Church Wellesley Village, Cabbagetown, St. Lawrence Market, Kensington Market, Chinatown, Greektown, Little Italy, Little India, Koreatown, Little Portugal, and many more all have a historic and cultural significance that contribute to the character of our communities, provide safe and welcoming environments, and support our tourism industry. They are the backbone and an important driver of Toronto's economy, fostering local entrepreneurship and creating jobs.

City Council has historically acknowledged the multiple challenges facing small businesses and has already undertaken a number of policy reforms to respond. Examples include:

- reducing the incremental property tax burden for small businesses relative to residential rates;
- reviewing taxation tools to provide relief to small business owners facing unsustainable Current Value Assessment-related tax increases capping commercial tax increases at 10 percent in the 2018 and 2019 City Budgets;
- ending the Vacant Commercial and Industrial Unit Tax Rebate Program; and
- strengthening Toronto's economy through winter-focused events, festivals and recreation activities, and strengthening the night-time economy.

Despite the City of Toronto's efforts over the years to support and retain small businesses, there are numerous indications that the small business sector, specifically independently owned, non-franchise LGBTQ2S+ businesses continue to experience significant stress. Widespread unaffordability and high commercial rents are adversely impacting the character of our neighbourhoods and the economic vitality of the City of Toronto. This indicates that a more holistic and coordinated response is necessary.

San Francisco has successfully implemented a small business economic retention strategy while Seattle and Vancouver are currently undertaking similar studies. Like Toronto, these cities share many of the same economic successes but face similar challenges retaining local

small businesses in the face of rising unaffordability and development speculation.

To support the retention and growth of independently owned, non-franchise LGBTQ2S+ businesses and cultural space, the City of Toronto needs a proactive and integrated strategy to supplement the work already being undertaken by the Chief Financial Officer and Treasurer, and the General Manager, Economic Development and Culture.

Background Information (City Council)

Member Motion MM14.8