A large red graphic in the top left corner consisting of several overlapping rectangular and triangular shapes, some with white diagonal lines.

September 11, 2020

Mayor John Tory
Office of the Mayor
City of Toronto
100 Queen Street West
Toronto, ON M5H 2N2

Re: yongeTOmorrow EA – Recommended Design Concept 4C

Dear Mayor Tory,

In follow up to our previous letter of November 5, 2019 pertaining to the City of Toronto formal EA Study on the future of the Yonge Street called yongeTOmorrow, we are deeply concerned that the “Recommended Design Concept” being put forward for public consultation does not reflect the views of the business community or other key stakeholders.

The Downtown Yonge Business Improvement Area represents more than 2,000 businesses and their employees, as well as the broader community of residents, students and visitors in the in the heart of downtown Toronto.

We have strongly advocated for Yonge Street to be a “flexible street” – temporarily closed to vehicular traffic for major festivals, events and other activations to boost the economy, but otherwise open as a regular thoroughfare. We are supportive of reducing the number of lanes to one in each direction, enabling wider sidewalks and an improved pedestrian experience. But we are against permanent closure of sections of Yonge St., which would have serious negative consequences both operationally and economically.

Our organization has done extensive work around the future of Yonge St., as far back as 2012 with our “Celebrate Yonge” activation – ostensibly a transit study, with curb lane activations similar to the Café TO program initiated during COVID-19, narrowing Yonge St. from four lanes to two. Additionally, in 2014 we conducted an extensive Yonge Love consultation on perceptions and desires for Yonge St., canvassing views on what is needed for Yonge St. to maintain its economic contribution to the neighbourhood and the well-being of the larger Downtown Toronto core.

From that consultation we were able to establish five key priorities, which has been the foundation for strategic thinking in our current operations and in our advocacy for the neighbourhood’s future.

Priorities

- Make Downtown Yonge a highly walkable neighbourhood
- Make Yonge Street a truly flexible street
- Make Yonge Street a truly complete street
- Make Downtown Yonge an always-vibrant neighbourhood

Downtown Yonge B.I.A.
40 Dundas St. W. #300, Toronto, ON M5G 2C2 | T 416.597.0255 F 416.597.0233 E bia@downtownyonge.com



- Make Downtown Yonge a truly inclusive neighbourhood

The Downtown Yonge BIA, supported by individual members and key community stakeholders, has been actively engaged in the yongeTOMorrow EA stakeholder advisory group. We have provided input into the work the City of Toronto has initiated, and after extensive meetings and discussion, we had hoped that a recommendation for design concepts would emerge that could be supported by the BIA membership and the larger community. Unfortunately, it appears our input has been disregarded, and we cannot support the recommended design being put forward.

A public consultation is currently scheduled for September 16, at which time the public will be able to make their comments on the recommended design.

The design that is being tabled is “Recommended Design Concept – 4C” which is a Pedestrian Priority with One-Way Driving Access and Cycle Tracks, with daily closures from 6 a.m. to 1 a.m. and overnight two-way access for buses, cars and trucks on all blocks.

After extensive discussion with our membership, employment clusters, large property owners and other key stakeholders, we are not able to support the recommended design concept 4C as presented.

Principles

Following are the principles the Downtown Yonge BIA considers vital in the yongeTOMorrow initiative's planning for revitalization of Yonge St. to foster economic prosperity and a vibrant community.

Permanent street closure, even for scheduled hours, is not acceptable.

- Permanently eliminating vehicular traffic would be catastrophic for business, significantly curtailing the number of customers and their interactions in the area.
- Closure of Yonge St. would exacerbate congestion on other downtown north-south arteries, as well as the east-west streets at either end of the closed section.
- Deliveries, waste management and other services for downtown businesses would be severely hampered.

Downtown Yonge BIA supports a “flexible street” concept.

- Sections of Yonge St. can be restricted to pedestrian traffic for major festivals and events – such as Luminato and NxNE – and other activations, but only on those occasions.
- Activations are key economic drivers and Yonge St. is an attractive location for them. By definition they take place during a finite time period; Yonge St. should be open for regular vehicular traffic at other times.

Reduce the number of lanes – one northbound, one southbound.

- Research indicates that the current volume of vehicular traffic on Yonge St. can be accommodated by one lane in each direction.

Downtown Yonge B.I.A.

40 Dundas St. W. #300, Toronto, ON M5G 2C2 | T 416.597.0255 F 416.597.0233 E bia@downtownyonge.com

Widen sidewalks – improving the pedestrian experience and enabling seasonal patios.

- Wider sidewalks would facilitate patios being established annually as a boost to food service businesses. (As demonstrated by the current Café TO initiative necessitated by the COVID-19 pandemic, patios are both popular and functional.)
- Wider sidewalks will ease pedestrian congestion, enabling more people to walk comfortably.

No bicycle lanes.

- When the street is restricted to pedestrians for activations, for safety reasons this would need to exclude cyclists as well as vehicular traffic.
- With only two lanes for vehicles and wider sidewalks to accommodate pedestrians, patios and activations, there is no room for bike lanes.
- The addition of the bike lanes on Bay St., University Ave. and Church St. can accommodate the north and south flows while connecting to the already established bike lanes for east-west flows via Gerrard St., Shuter St., Richmond St. and Adelaide St.

Create dedicated lay-bys for pick-up/drop-off.

- At regular intervals along Yonge St. there should be short bays – space for two vehicles, maximum – where cars and trucks can temporarily pull over without blocking a live lane. These need to be designed and implemented on both sides of Yonge St. where significant use has been identified with employment clusters, entertainment facilities and other high-use retail locations.
- Signage in these lay-bys should indicate that they are for short-term pick-up and drop-off only, vigilantly enforced.

Improve east-west access for deliveries.

- Fewer lanes on Yonge St., coupled with occasional closures for activations, will create new restrictions for delivery trucks and vans – at the same time as those deliveries are increasing dramatically because of the rise in online shopping. Measures to accommodate deliveries should include:
 - Dedicated loading/unloading zones on all east-west streets intersecting with Yonge St., enabling delivery vehicles to stop within a relatively short distance of their destinations.
 - Designated free (temporary) parking spaces for delivery vehicles in adjacent parking lots.

Install vehicle mitigation barriers.

- To reinforce a clear distinction between vehicle and pedestrian traffic – and to enhance safety – mitigation barriers, such as cement planters and bollards, should line the sidewalk. This should be part of an overall CPTED (Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design).

Include power and water in street design.

- Power and water supplies are essential for both regular maintenance and to support activations.
- Re-designing Yonge St. will be a generational opportunity to upgrade underground systems, and must be considered in all planning decisions.

Downtown Yonge B.I.A.

40 Dundas St. W. #300, Toronto, ON M5G 2C2 | T 416.597.0255 F 416.597.0233 E bia@downtownyonge.com

Move TTC ventilation.

- Designs for improved pedestrian experiences should take subway ventilation into account, installing intake and outlet vents in areas that will not impede pedestrians.
- The overall safety for the TTC should be taken into consideration with open venting from the street to the tracks or in close proximity to a station platform.

Take a holistic approach to safety.

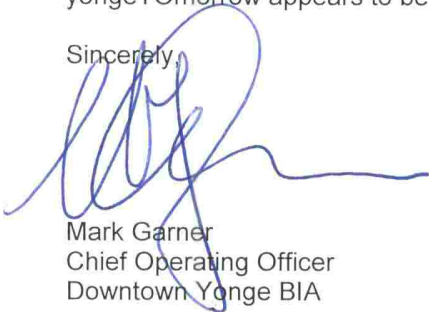
- It is imperative that designs for Yonge St. address existing and ongoing community safety issues, including cleaning, outreach and other proactive services to instill a sense of safety and comfort for residents and visitors alike.
- Pedestrianizing any part of Yonge St., at any time, requires the appropriate social services and neighbourhood supports.

Based on these design principles and the imperative of recognizing and addressing the current situation of Yonge St., we cannot support the recommended design concept 4C.

Mr. Mayor, the Downtown Yonge BIA is committed to working with the City of Toronto to ensure that our neighbourhood is vibrant and successful – economically, socially and culturally. We need a firm commitment from the City that designs for the future of Yonge St. will address expected service level maintenance, plant materials and a commitment to a holistic and well-managed approach.

Recommended design concept 4C falls far short of these objectives, and we must voice our opposition to the vision as currently presented. We implore you to intervene to reconsider the direction yongeTOmorrow appears to be headed.

Sincerely,



Mark Garner
Chief Operating Officer
Downtown Yonge BIA

cc. Councillor Kristyn Wong-Tam, City Councillor Ward 13
Johanna Kyte, Project Manager Major Projects, City of Toronto
Infrastructure and Environment Committee, City of Toronto
Board of Directors, Downtown Yonge BIA

