



Protecting LGBTQ2S+ small businesses and cultural spaces in Church & Wellesley

June 22, 2021 – Presentation to the LGBTQ2S+ Council Advisory Committee

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Overview

Through this presentation, EDC aims to gather feedback from the LGBTQ2S+ Council Advisory Committee early in the process. Feedback will inform next steps of this work, and an update will be presented to the LGBTQ2S+ Council Advisory Committee in Q3 or Q4, 2021.

- 1. Economic Development and Culture (EDC)**
- 2. Background**
- 3. Preliminary work – Consultations and Research**
- 4. Considerations Moving Forward**
- 5. Next Steps**

Economic Development and Culture



Making Toronto a place where
business and
culture thrive

EDC leads a broad range of activities, which include programs and services related to:



BUSINESS GROWTH SERVICES



FILM & ENTERTAINMENT INDUSTRIES



ARTS & CULTURE SERVICES



MUSEUMS & HERITAGE SERVICES

Background

On January 29, 2020, City Council adopted Councillor Wong-Tam's motion ([MM14.8](#)), which directed the General Manager, Economic Development and Culture to:

- (a) 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.
- (a) develop immediate and long-term recommendations to support the retention and growth of independently owned and operated LGBTQ2S+ small businesses and cultural spaces - in consultation with the Church-Wellesley Village Business Improvement Area, other Business Improvement Areas, Toronto Association of Business Improvement Areas and the Chief Planner and Executive Director, City Planning.

Background

The motion also noted that:

LGBTQ2S+ communities continue to face systemic barriers, including higher rates of depression and other mental health challenges associated with social isolation

LGBTQ2S+ communities should continue to benefit from the sense of belonging offered by the Church & Wellesley Village and by LGBTQ2S+ businesses and cultural spaces

LGBTQ2S+ businesses and cultural spaces continue to face significant stress, which adversely affect the character of the Church & Wellesley area and Toronto's vitality

Background

Many LGBTQ2S+ Spaces and spaces with LGBTQ2S+-focused activities have closed or are under threat:

1. The Barn (Church & Gerrard) – early 2010s
2. Slacks (Church & Wellesley) – 2012-14
3. The Henhouse (Dundas Street West) – 2015
4. Zipperz (Church & Carlton) – around 2016
5. The Steady (Bloor & Dovercourt) – 2017
6. Soybomb (Bathurst St) – 2017
7. Holy Oak – 2017
8. Less Bar – 2018 (estimated)
9. Remington's strip club (Yonge & Gerrard) – 2018
10. Double Double Land – 2018
11. Fly 2.0 – 2019
12. Margin of Eras – 2020
13. Club 120 (Church & Queen) – 2020

* Draft list based on information from Pride Toronto and the 519.

Preliminary Work – Consultations

- EDC conducted preliminary consultations to identify challenges for LGBTQ2S+ small businesses and cultural spaces in the Church & Wellesley Village.

Among others, consultations included:

- The 519
- Pride Toronto
- Church & Wellesley BIA
- ERA Architects

Common themes included:

- Displacement because of increased costs
- Loss of character of the area
- Loss of safe spaces for LGBTQ2S+ communities
- Loss of LGBTQ2S+ visibility/sense of belonging

Preliminary Work – Consultations

Among opportunities identified in preliminary consultations:

- Determine supports for arts and culture, for small businesses while promoting LGBTQ2S+ identity in Church & Wellesley.
- Recognize and/or designate the Church & Wellesley Village as a zone of cultural and economic impact.
- Explore the possibility of providing incentives to LGBTQ2S+ legacy businesses by creating a designation.
- Better communicate the history, culture, heritage, and economic impact of Church & Wellesley.

Preliminary Work – Research

- EDC continues to conduct research regarding relevant City of Toronto programs and whether/how they support LGBTQ2S+ communities.

Over 25 programs/services categorized as:

- Supports for starting businesses
- Supports for retaining/expanding businesses
- Supports for creative businesses
- Access to City space for arts and culture
- Supports that promote a commercial and cultural neighbourhood

Assessment based on

A. Whether the program, or part of it, has an explicit focus on LGBTQ2S+ communities

B. Whether LGBTQ2S+ communities are accessing and benefiting from the program

Preliminary Work – Research

Among findings to date: there is no explicit/specific focus on LGBTQ2S+-owned, operated and/or controlled businesses and cultural spaces. There is insufficient information to determine whether LGBTQ2S+ individuals are benefitting from programs.

- **Social Procurement – Diverse Supplier List:** There are 49 LGBTQ2S+ businesses (over 10% of the total), as certified by the Canadian Gay and Lesbian Chamber of Commerce, on the diverse supplier list.
- **Enterprise Toronto – Starter Company Plus Grant Program:** A total of 10 grants (12% of the total, 84) were approved for clients who self-identified as LGBTQ2S+ during the fiscal period of April 1, 2020 – March 31, 2021.
- **Enterprise Toronto – Seminars:** A total of 21 attendees (5% of the total, 409) self-identified as LGBTQ2S+ between January 27 and March 29, 2021.

Current Supports – Examples

Supports for starting businesses

Programs under Enterprise Toronto: online training covering the basics to start businesses, mentoring support to develop business plans, year-round focused learning opportunities and micro - grant funding streams for participants to start/grow a business.

Supports for retaining/expanding businesses

- Social Procurement – Diverse Supplier: staff are required to invite diverse suppliers when purchasing goods and services between \$3,000 and \$100,000 to submit quotations, and suppliers are encouraged to develop their own diverse supplier list for purchases over \$100,000.
- Gold Star Program: customized one-on-one assistance for businesses to navigate the review and approval process in order to expedite commercial office and building projects.
- Enterprise Toronto: one-on-one business consultation support provided to new and existing entrepreneurs in the development of goals, strategies & plans that will provide them with the necessary tools to develop and grow their business.

Current Supports – Examples

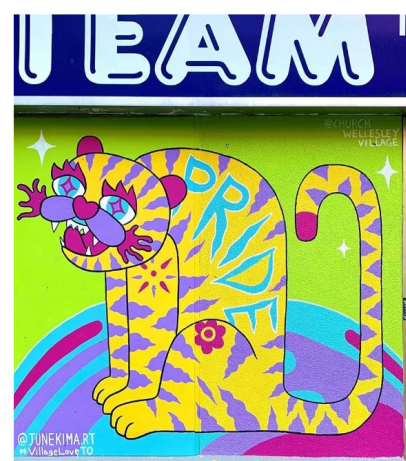
Supports for creative businesses

- Creative Co-Location Property Tax Subclasses: 50% reduction in the commercial property class rates. In 2020, it was expanded to include live music venues as part of the City’s COVID-19 recovery efforts (venues with musical artists and DJs with a curatorial role eligible).

Supports that help promote a commercial/cultural neighbourhood

- BIA-related incentives: programs that provide funding to further promote the business area as a safe, vibrant place, also supporting the neighbourhood identity.

- **Church & Wellesley:**
 - Winter Activation Grant (2020) - \$12,500
 - Mural and Street Art Grant (2021) - \$5,000
 - CafeTO Grant (2020 and 2021) - \$5,000 each year
 - Downtown East Action Plan Grant (2021): \$50,000
 - BIA Streetscape Master Plan funding approved (2020) and study underway (2021) – 50% of final cost up to \$25,000



Some of the “Signs of Safety” Winter Activations in the Village

Considerations

Based on findings regarding consultations and research, more needs to be done to address the following:

1. Although the City of Toronto has long led efforts to address challenges facing small businesses and the need to make cultural spaces available to local communities, **LGBTQ2S+ spaces continue to be in danger of closing in Toronto.**
2. LGBTQ2S+ spaces are meaningful to the LGBTQ2S+ community, a historically marginalized group, being important to their sense of safety, community, and belonging. **These spaces are also significant for Toronto's economic and cultural vitality.**
3. **The Church & Wellesley Village, in particular, has historically been a community hub and tourist destination,** concentrating unique cultural spaces, pubs, stores, bookshops and eateries that are important and meaningful to the identity of Toronto's LGBTQ2S+ community.
4. Development speculation, increasing unaffordability, and the negative and ongoing impact of COVID-19 in retail and other businesses make it **essential to make the protection of LGBTQ2S+ spaces a priority,** proactively supporting Toronto's economy, culture and heritage.

Next Steps

- As an immediate next step, support the Church & Wellesley BIA with a grant of \$20,000 for 12 sessions for local business owners/entrepreneurs in Church & Wellesley centered on “Recovery and Rebuild to Support and Strategize”.

Education/networking series will include local capacity-building activities; entrepreneurship support; small business/retail main street support; and sector-based workforce development activities.

- Explore long-term meaningful options to protect LGBTQ2S+ small businesses and cultural spaces based on findings to date, and present an update to the LGBTQ2S+ CAB on September 27, 2021.

- In addition:

In consultation with the Toronto Arts Council, EDC will convene a roundtable to consult with local stakeholders and community leaders on how to further support independent live performance venues, including drag bars - report back in 2022

Through a granting reform, EDC will explore how to expand opportunities to improve access for grants for LGBTQ2S+ artists and arts organizations (options for more equitable cultural funding and for non-grants assistance) - report back in 2022

- The City is exploring how the recently announced small business property tax subclass may be implemented in Toronto, with an expert panel and broader engagement as next steps.



Thank you