



BRIGHT LIGHTS - BIG CITY

A Signage Vision for the Downtown Yonge Strip

DRAFT - July 2008

Prepared for the **Downtown Yonge Business Improvement Area**

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A Signage Vision for the Downtown Yonge Strip
DRAFT - July 2008



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Contents

1	Introduction	1
2	The Context	3
3	The Vision	13
4	The Approach	15
5	The Urban Design Strategy	23
6	Other Considerations & Implementation	39

Appendix A: City of Toronto: Listed and Designated Heritage Properties along the Yonge Strip

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Introduction 1

In early 2006 the Downtown Yonge Business Improvement Area (DYBIA) was requested by the City of Toronto to provide a vision that dealt with Third-party signage. Through the course of the process, it became evident that a vision was necessary to guide all large-format signage – defined as ‘billboard’-scaled, and often digitally animated and/or illuminated first and third-party signage; the concentration of which is unique to this part of the city. The purpose of this initiative is to provide recommendations to the DYBIA and the City of Toronto on an approach to guiding and assessing applications for large-format signage which can balance the interests of the BIA membership with broader district and city urban design objectives.

The following document presents a rational approach and guiding framework for large-format signage. There is an increasing interest in the installation of animated large-format signage and technological advances in signage are leading to exciting new design possibilities. However, there are limitations with the current signage policy and its ability to adequately address this area's unique existing and emerging signage context.

This signage vision evolved over a two year process that included consultation with the DYBIA membership, Councillor Rae and various relevant City of Toronto departments, including Planning, Urban Design and Heritage.



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Opening in October
Highway 400 & Ruthers

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CTV

Gerard

LEATHER
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18 1/2
Crown

Downtown Yonge Business Improvement Area

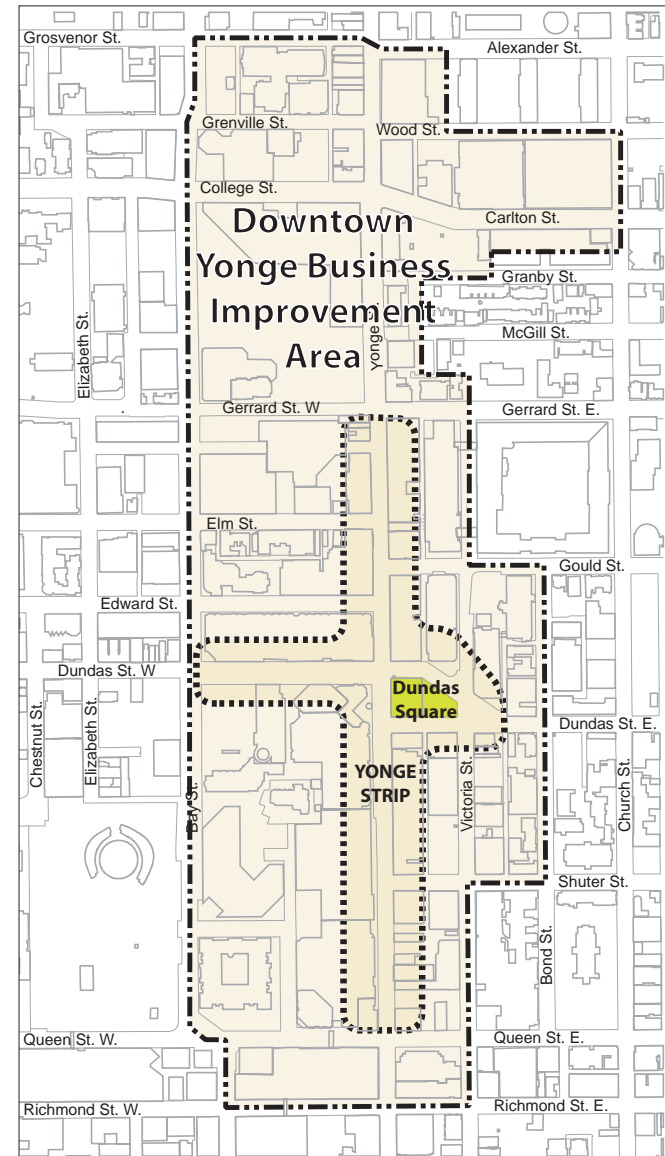
The DYBIA is a non-profit organization committed to improving and promoting Toronto's downtown core. It was formed in 2001 as a result of the efforts of the former Yonge Street Business and Residents Association. The DYBIA's members include approximately 2000 local business and property owners who share a common goal — to improve the Downtown Yonge area and make it safer, cleaner and more attractive to visitors. To accomplish this, the DYBIA has implemented a number of programs to enhance and maintain this distinct part of Toronto's downtown core.

Funding for the Downtown Yonge Business Improvement Area comes from a supplementary tax levied on all commercial buildings within its boundaries. The City of Toronto collects this money and returns it to the community to fund local programs and improvements.

Study Area

For this study, the DYBIA area was considered - generally bounded by Grosvenor and Alexander Streets to the north, Bay Street to the west, Richmond Street to the south, and Church Street and Bond Streets to the east.

Having considered the entire DYBIA, this vision largely confines the area appropriate for large-format signage to the famed Yonge Street 'strip' (Yonge Strip) with Dundas Square at its heart. Specifically, this Vision only applies to those properties with principle frontages directly on Yonge St. and Dundas Square. Included is the small segment of Dundas Street between Yonge and Bay Streets, where large-format first-party signage has occurred in conjunction with significant developments and renovations. This small segment will have unique requirements for signage reflective of its different character as a transition area to the Yonge Street 'Strip'.



View looking south on Yonge Street at Gerrard Street



City of Toronto Archives, Series 574, 02574_0028_049495



Signage Context

Large-format signage in general refers to outdoor advertisement which is located on or above buildings but which is unrelated to that location or the business conducted on that property. Typically, the advertisement promotes products and services of private commercial corporations. Large-format signage occurs in this area in a variety of ways, including:

- Rigid signage hung on building walls
- Banners hung on building walls
- Applied on temporary hoarding around construction sites
- Structural 'billboards' on top of buildings
- Media towers as stand-alone structures or on top of buildings
- Painted on the sides of building

A clear approach to guiding and assessing applications for large-format signage should balance the interests of the DYBIA membership with broader planning and urban design objectives for the Downtown.

Initially, mostly associated with local businesses, bold large-format signage have historically been a defining characteristic of the area. Not only does this spectacular approach to signage contribute to the area's draw as one of the city's pre-eminent shopping and tourist destinations, it is also the source of the area's distinct 'sense of place'. Unique to this context, even signs alone have been recognized for their cultural and heritage value. By way of example, the former Sam the Record Man's iconic large-format neon signage was recognized for its cultural heritage value in 2007.

The 'Yonge Strip' also has a significant number of heritage buildings and several landmarks. New signage should be reconciled with historic buildings and signage.

Current large-format signage applications far exceed existing standards and are addressed on an ad hoc basis without a clear sense of what the cumulative outcome will be. The current proliferation of next-generation signage is emerging on an unprecedented scale, and a legitimate concern is emerging for ensuring an overall consistency in the quality of signage and its contribution to the area's distinct character.

Ensuring that signage does not compromise the visual appeal and physical comfort of the public realm, and the pedestrian environment is considered central to the enhancement of the DYBIA. The quality of existing facades and the interface between the grade-levels and sidewalks form an important focus for the architectural and civic character of the area.



1. *The Yonge Street Strip at approximately Yonge Street and Shuter Street (1950) shows how signage has always been a part of this areas identity*
2. *The Eaton Centre provides ample space for wall-hung signage*
3. *Signage reinforces the character of the Yonge Street Strip north of Gould Street*
4. *Large-format signage helps define Yonge-Dundas Square, at 385 Yonge Street*
5. *First-party signage supports at-grade retail*
6. *Hoarding acts as signage for Toronto Life Square, a retail and entertainment complex on the north-east corner of Yonge and Dundas Streets*
7. *The Canon Theatre and local retailers north of Shuter Street*
8. *The Yonge Street Strip, looking south from Gerrard Street*
9. *Yonge Street, looking north at Dundas Street, 1923 (City of Toronto Archives)*



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A splash of flavour
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Illegal immigrants, allies protest in U.S.

Panasonic

OLYMPIC SPIRIT

TORONTO

INFORMATION
SIGHTSEEING

dent
mas

Any
Time
One
Pack

Planning Context

This study builds upon past and ongoing initiatives for improving the area, including:

The Provincial Policy Statement (2005) (PPS) provides an overall vision for Ontario's land use planning system. The current PPS came into effect on March 1, 2005 and includes policies that provide guidance with new construction adjacent to heritage properties. Section 2.6.3 permits development and site alteration on lands adjacent to protected heritage properties provided the proposed development has been evaluated and it has been demonstrated that the heritage attributes of the protected heritage property will be conserved.

City of Toronto Official Plan

The 'Yonge Strip' area falls within the Downtown and Central Waterfront designation. This area has a land-use designation of Mixed Use Area and has a site and area specific policy pertaining to the area. The Toronto Official Plan recognizes the unique identity and it's pre-eminence as a regional shopping and tourist destination. To reinforce this, lands within close proximity to Yonge-Dundas are considered to be the most appropriate and desirable location for significant change. Furthermore, section 3.1.5 outlines the City's objectives with respect to heritage preservation, restoration, and developments adjacent to existing heritage resources. This signage vision is consistent with the Official Plan policies and can help achieve the City's objectives by providing a clear and coherent vision for the large-format signage that will enhance the area, further reinforce its prominence as a retailing centre and major tourist attraction for the city, and ensure that heritage resources are protected and enhanced.

City of Toronto Zoning By-Law

Zoning By-Law 438-86 of the City of Toronto governs the area defined in this signage vision. The zoning by-law prescribes the permitted uses, the maximum height and density, as well as other regulations that implement urban design objectives such as setbacks and angular plane requirements. The 'Yonge Strip' defined within this vision is zoned as a Mixed Use (CR) District. Several of the sites surrounding Yonge-Dundas Square have

View looking of Yonge-Dundas Square looking east from Yonge Street



Rigid Hung Signage



Structural Billboard



Banner Hung Signage



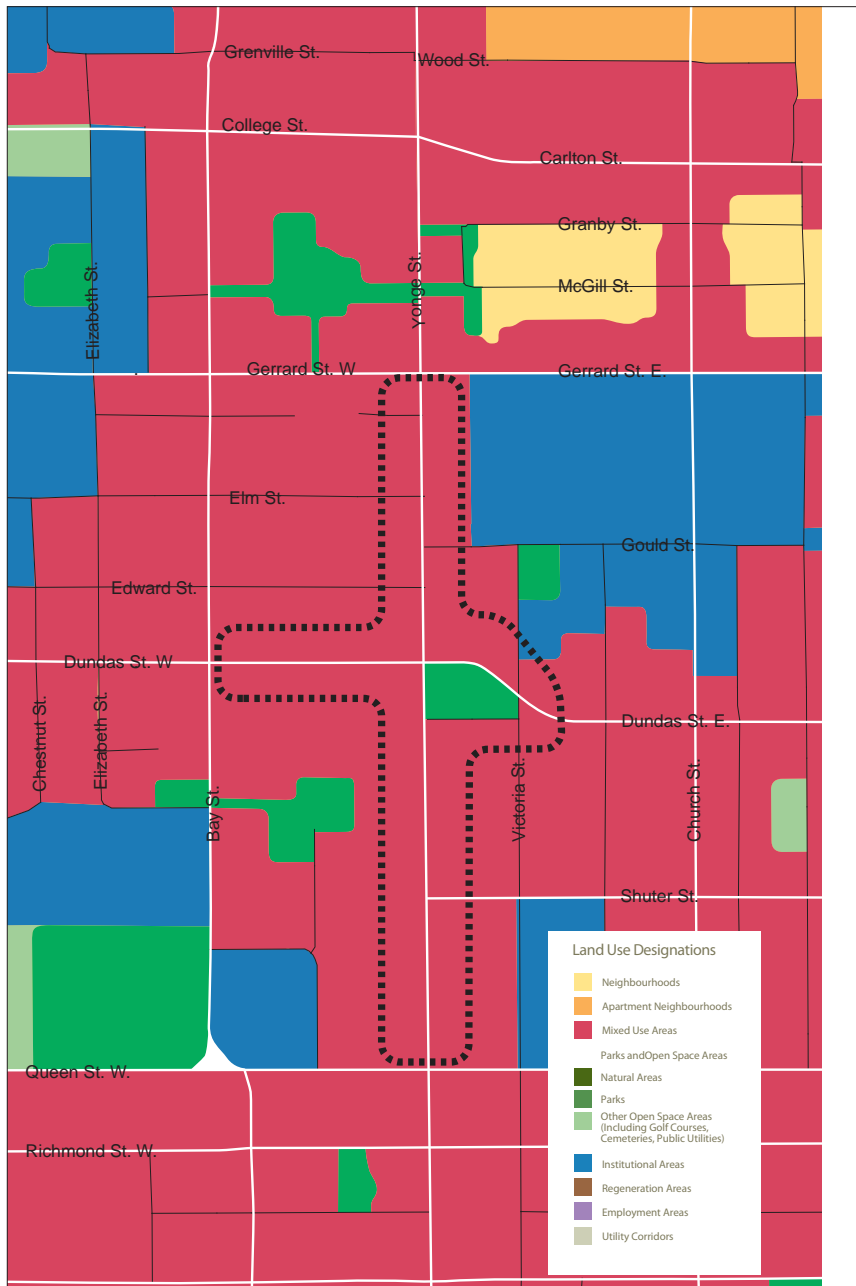
Painted Signage



Signage applied to temporary hoarding



Media Tower installed on building



site-specific by-laws to permit the unique signage treatments on those buildings.

The maximum heights for the 'Yonge Strip' are generally reflective of the existing built form and envelopes defined by the zoning by-law, and step down from Queen Street to the south, and Gerrard Street to the north. This in combination with the angular planes that define a certain scale for the street walls reflects the City's objectives with respect to directing larger scaled buildings along the Bay Street corridor while built forms more complimentary to shopping streets that are more human scaled and that permit adequate sun penetration are directed to Yonge Street:

Queen Street to Dundas Street

Between Queen St and Dundas St, maximum permitted heights are 76.0m at the Yonge St. and Queen St. intersection and along the west side of Yonge St. Along the east side of Yonge St, heights step down from 76.0m to 46.0m up to just north of Shuter St. and then decrease to 30.0m up to Dundas Square. Portions of a building greater than 28 metres in height on the east side of Yonge Street are subject to a 60 degree angular plane.

Dundas Street to Gerrard Street

North of Dundas St., the maximum permitted height for the east and west side of Yonge St. is 20.0m. Portions of a building greater than 16 metres in height on either side of Yonge Street are subject to a 44 degree angular plane.

This signage vision could help strengthen and articulate the existing and intended street wall heights by promoting signage as a built form component consistent with the current zoning permissions.

The Standards and Guidelines for the Conservation of Historic Places in Canada (2003) is the first-ever pan-Canadian benchmark for heritage conservation practice in Canada. It offers results oriented guidance for sound decision making when planning for, intervening in and using historic places. In March 2007, Council adopted *The Standards and Guidelines for the Conservation of Historic Places in Canada* as the official



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Constraints and Opportunities

A number of constraints and opportunities have helped to define this vision for signage. The following summary emerges from general research, an analysis of existing conditions, consideration of relevant standards and conditions from other cities and as a result of consultation that included the DYBIA, the City, landowners, and proponents of large-format signage.

Issues and Constraints

- Adjacent residential areas, hospitals and public institutions pose serious constraints to the scale, illumination and locations for large-format signage and therefore limit the extent of where vibrant signage should be located.
- If not properly located, large-format signage could result in conflicts with at-grade First-party commercial signage and the ability for the pedestrian to discern between the two.
- Different types of signage (banners, wall-hung, structures and temporary signs) create new challenges to integrating visual media in a consistent manner.
- Currently, there is an inconsistency in the quality of all signage in the area and discerning the difference between Third-party and First-party signage is challenging at best.
- Large signage installations create potential exposure and safety issues in different weather conditions that must be considered.
- There are shadowing and wind impacts associated with large signage installations that extend beyond the existing built form.
- The quality and upkeep of properties and in particular heritage structures is in need of consideration.
- The integration of signage on heritage properties in a compatible manner that does not detract from the cultural heritage value of the building.

Inconsistency in the quality of all signage in the area: view looking south on Yonge Street towards the Gould Street intersection

Strengths and Opportunities

- A clearly defined area with vibrant signage already exists and can be reinforced without raising significant concerns about compatibility.
- High quality signage that is well designed and well placed can reinforce the identity of the area as a pre-eminent shopping destination and unique tourist attraction.
- Façades and Heritage Buildings can be significantly improved as a result of the potential revenue generated from large-format signage.
- Consistent parameters for design of signage within a defined framework can improve the visual coherence of the area and enhance the pedestrian experience.
- Ensuring an appropriate relationship between First-party and Third-party signage can ensure the health of both sectors.
- The integration of public art in a unique way that is tailored to the signage character of the area can serve to further enhance the area's appeal for local shoppers and tourists.



Adjacent residential areas, hospitals and public institutions pose serious constraints to the scale, illumination and locations for large-format signage and therefore constrain the extent of the area for vibrant signage.



The Mac Store

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The Vision 3

Integral to the unique identity of the DYBIA, large-format signage is embedded within a Vision for the 'Yonge Strip' that encompasses all signage and considers it in the context of the area's existing, emerging and potential economic, civic and destination role and function for Toronto:

A signage vision should ensure that the Downtown 'Yonge Strip' will continue to be one of the City's most important, vibrant and recognizable commercial streets while evolving and transforming into one of the City's greatest civic achievements.

The Downtown 'Yonge Strip' will continue to build and improve upon its unique and distinct qualities with high quality signage as a defining characteristic that frames and enhances public space; that respects and celebrates heritage; and, that serves to create a contemporary, exhilarating, dynamic and ever-changing urban experience that will resonate with all ages, during the day and night, and in all seasons.

Appealing and innovative signage along the 'Yonge Strip' will aim to provide a unique architectural and civic environment of a quality and calibre that will place it amongst the world's most renowned destinations and will therefore play an important role in shaping and promoting the image of Toronto as an exciting, cosmopolitan and modern city.

The following sections recommend an Approach to signage, and an Urban Design Strategy with relevant Guiding Design Principles to bring this Vision to life.



The following approach establishes a framework for addressing large-format signage so as to bring this vision to fruition.

Acknowledge a Distinct Precinct with Tailored Rules for Signage

The creation of a distinct precinct within the DYBIA is both endorsed and recognized by the BIA as fundamental to achieving a bold vision concerning large-format signage. As noted in the Downtown Yonge Street Improvement Plan, the unique signage context of the precinct requires “special rules” to govern signage. An approach that includes special considerations and exceptions within this defined precinct is further reinforced by several considerations:

- *The 'Yonge Strip' specifically is an area that has historically been characterized by its concentration of signage that is distinct in extent, scale and animation from anywhere else in the City, if not the country. Both existing and emerging signage trends reinforce and enhance this context.*
- *Vibrant, enormous and highly illuminated commercial signage is already a broadly accepted condition that residents and tourists associate with and expect within this specific area. Encouraging a concentration of signage within the area can also ensure the critical mass necessary to achieve a cohesive urban design vision for the precinct.*
- *However, because the 'Yonge Strip' is recognized as a unique area for signage within the city, an exceptional approach has been considered for signage on heritage buildings.*

Moreover, this distinct area should be acknowledged as such in the context of the entire city. Consequently, the primary interest in this precinct is focused on the design and quality of all signage that form part of the urban street-wall helping to define public space. This distinction on a city-wide basis is important to ensuring the viability of the Urban Design objectives envisioned as an outcome of exceptional large-format signage permissions; and, to assuring a level of certainty for residents and other incompatible land uses that such signage will not encroach beyond this clearly defined area.

Acknowledge the distinct signage context of the Yonge Street Strip: view looking north on Yonge Street



Develop a Design Strategy that Considers All Signage within the District Precinct

Within the 'Yonge Strip' - the segment generally bounded by Gerrard and Queen Streets - Third-party signage is often indistinguishable from all other signage in its scale, location and character. The sheer magnitude, concentration, variety and broad range of installations create a context of signage that on one hand defines the distinction of this precinct, and on the other, defies conventional categories.

Whether signage *conceals* the majority of the façade as in the landmark "Sam The Record Man", or is *inset* within the façade as in the Eaton Centre, or is *free-standing structures* atop of buildings as those rising around Dundas Square, or is *integral* to the façade as in the Zanzibar, the commercial advertisement is all-pervading. It is this immersion in all signage that creates the colourful, animated and illuminated environment that defines this precinct.

If this is to be the desired 'civic' outcome and distinction of the area, then clearly Third-party signage alongside First-party signage is an essential means of enabling this vision. Consequently, the primary 'public' interest in this context is less about the accumulation and encroachment of advertising on public space and more about the form and quality of all signage as a framework for public space. Hence, the strategies and principles presented in this vision reflect an integrated approach that considers both Third-party and First-party signage.

Third-party signage is indistinguishable from other signage in its scale, location and character: view looking north on Yonge Street at the Gould intersection

Harness the Propensity for Signage to Generate a Grand Urban Design Gesture

For a vision of signage of this magnitude to be successful, urban design initiatives need to exist within a cohesive and structured civic framework that is consistently applied by the City. While it may be desirable to permit almost free license in the deployment of advertisements on any given site, the same principle would not necessarily apply to the quality, siting and massing of the signage itself. A lack of design controls on signage could lead to a cluttered and disordered environment that would undermine the precinct's attraction and appeal.

Consequently, individual signage should be subject to an overarching urban design strategy that reinforces and enhances the pedestrian experience and distinct 'sense of place' of the 'Yonge Strip'. This signage vision provides an urban design strategy that can be easily understood by applicants and the merits of individual applications should be easily evaluated against guidelines that may be developed to implement this strategy.

Principles that should apply to an urban design strategy for signage include:

- *A legible hierarchy that acknowledges Dundas Square at the core of the precinct, while acknowledging other sites of lesser importance but of visual prominence such as precinct gateways, view termini and corner sites.*
- *Reinforcement of a continuous, human-scaled and proportional street enclosure.*
- *A sensitive relationship that respects heritage resources and is linked to restoration initiatives.*
- *Minimal adverse shadow and wind impacts on public spaces and light pollution on adjacent residential areas.*
- *Signage should correspond to improvements in façades and grade level conditions of host buildings.*
- *Higher architectural design, material and structural standards.*

Signage can reinforce Urban Design objectives: Yonge-Dundas Square is envisioned to be the central focus for the area and signage can reinforce this hierarchy





Protect and Enhance Heritage Buildings and Ensure Compatible Signage Design

Heritage buildings form an important part of the character and urban structure of the 'Yonge Strip'. Heritage buildings contribute a valued and unique sense of history and place which should be preserved and protected so they remain important landmarks and indicators of the history in the area. To that end, special conditions for large-format signage on heritage buildings in the area should be adhered to. Although large-format signs will not be restricted from all heritage buildings in the area, it is important to realize that not all heritage buildings may be able to accommodate large-format signage.

To enhance the precinct's unique and distinct qualities, signage should be sympathetic, subordinate and compatible with the existing heritage structure by respecting the building's architectural proportions as defined by its vertical and horizontal articulations, including window openings. The *Standards and Guidelines for the Conservation of Historic Places in Canada* should be consulted whenever signage is added to, or has the potential to impact, a listed or designated heritage property. The objective is for signage to compliment rather than detract from the defining characteristics of the heritage building. Large-format third-party signage may also provide revenues that can be streamed, in part, into conservation and rehabilitation of important heritage buildings in the 'Yonge Strip'.

With this objective in mind, opportunities for signage on heritage resources require detailed study in conjunction with a heritage conservation strategy. In addition, when evaluating proposed signage on buildings adjacent to heritage resources, the evaluation will consider the proposal's relationship to and impacts on the heritage resources. Any recommendations considered will be building specific. Within this approach, contemporary signage design can coexist with historic architecture.

Signage should be sympathetic and compatible with heritage buildings: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York City.

Installations of Large-Format Signage Must Ensure Significant Improvements to the Host Building and the Viability of Commercial Uses

Large-format signage presents a tremendous opportunity to raise the bar on all design and the environmental quality of the precinct. The installation of any large-format signage must correspond directly to an overall improvement to the façade and in particular to the grade-level conditions of the building where it interfaces with the street. Specifically:

Signage should reinforce and not conceal the building's key architectural features and should enhance the attributes and characteristics of heritage resources where applicable.

Grade-level retail uses must continue to exist and signage should not restrict the viability of that use in any way.

Grade-level transparency is a fundamental characteristic in the animation of the sidewalk and should not be inhibited by blank walls, cluttered shop windows or signage.

Signage located at-grade should correspond to the at-grade use or activity and only first-party signage will be permitted on the first two storeys of the building to enhance the pedestrian experience and protect local retail commercial activity.

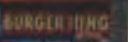
Large-format signage is not permitted to conceal windows to residential uses. Large-format signage concealing windows on non-residential uses is discouraged, however may be permitted with special consideration given to light penetration, visibility, building context, and subject to the review and approval of City Planning.

The overall cleanliness and upkeep of an exposed façade associated with new signage is to be of paramount consideration in its installation.

Eligibility for Third-party signage would require applicants to include a securable plan and strategy for the concurrent improvements to the remaining visible aspects of the building, including but not restricted to: the restoration of heritage structure if applicable; improvements to other signage on the building; graffiti removal; improvements to façade finishes; de-cluttering and upgrading storefronts and glazing; and, the removal of signage that is not consistent with the vision and desired signage quality of the precinct.

Large-format signage development should correspond to overall improvements to the host property: view of recent Eaton Centre renovations





Ensure Signage is of the Highest Quality and Contributes to the Precinct's Distinction on the Global Stage

Although this bold approach to signage may be distinct for Toronto, it is not unique to the world.

Cities such as New York, Tokyo, London and Las Vegas demonstrate examples of greater magnitude, quality and notoriety than that of the 'Yonge Strip'. To transform the area into an attraction with a global presence, installations should showcase design, quality and innovation, and seek to provide an experience distinct from its global counterparts. To generate such an effect, commercial signage installations must be considered in concert with creative enhancements to public space and infrastructure in the precinct.

For example, public art that employs technology or streetscaping features that incorporate animated qualities and/or sounds can be viable considerations if even a small proportion of the revenues generated by third-party signage can be redirected back into public realm improvements for the 'Yonge Strip'.



Ensure distinction from global counterparts: Tokyo



Ensure distinction from global counterparts: New York City

Ensure distinction from global counterparts: London, UK



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& SPORTSWEAR

399

THE JUMP OFF
THE JUMP OFF
THE JUMP OFF

LEATHER

BARCLAY JEWELRY



Grey's Anatomy
END OF THE CEV

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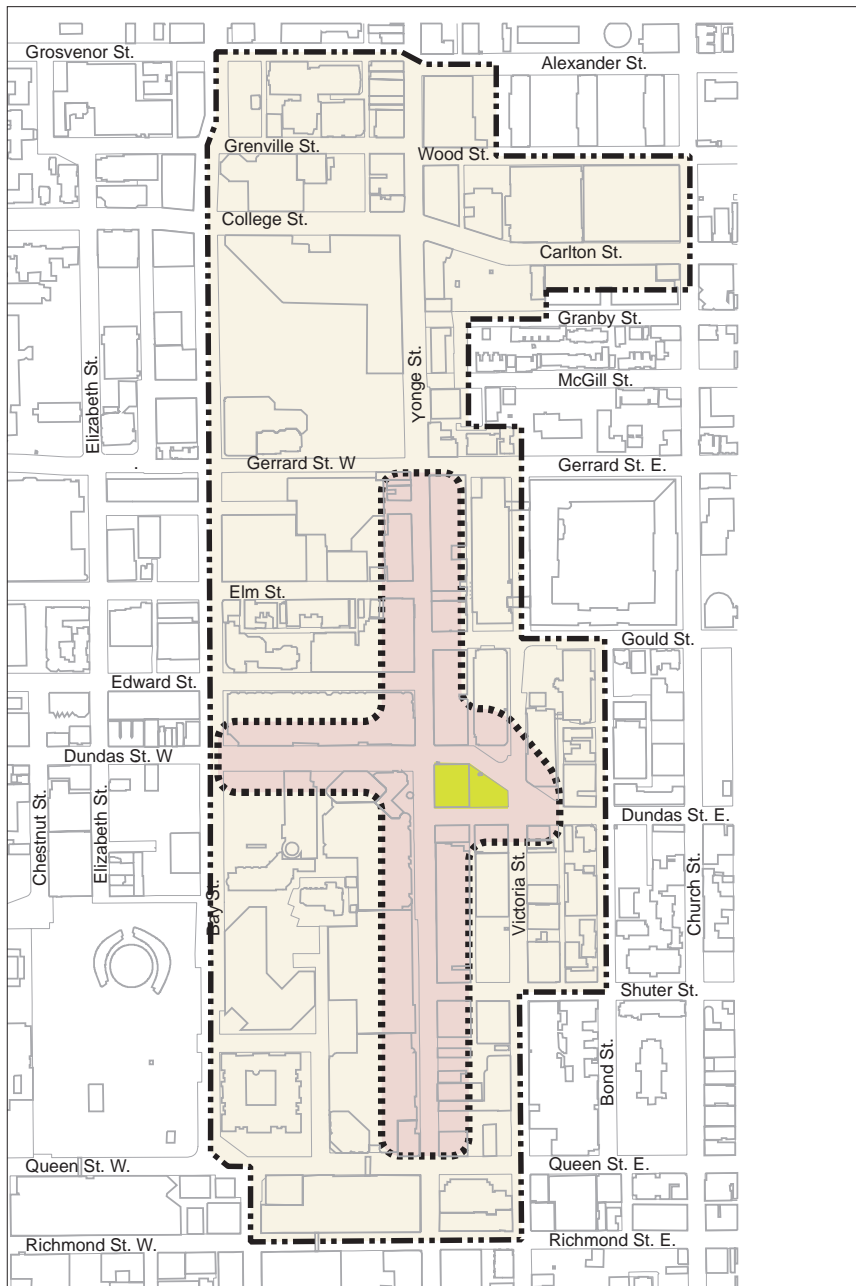
DOWNTOWN

Grey's Anatomy
END OF THE CEV

The Urban Design Strategy 5

The following section sets out a strategy to permit high calibre, spectacular signage that helps to strengthen the precinct as a special place in Toronto. The strategy recognizes the opportunity for signage to become an integral built form component and contribute to urban design objectives for the precinct. The emphasis is on establishing a clearly defined urban design framework that governs all signage and requires any sign to meet high architectural and design standards.





Define a Distinct Precinct

Defining a distinct precinct for special rules for signage provides for clarity for the public and landowners and will ensure a consolidated and cohesive urban design strategy.

The 'Yonge Strip' Precinct:

Vibrant and large-scale Third-party party signage already exists and is a defining characteristic of this precinct. Large-format signage in this area should be subject to special rules that are exceptional to any other location in the city and that are considered within an integrated vision that addresses all signage in the precinct.

Remaining Areas:

Significant Constraints on illumination levels and scale are appropriate and to be expected. The Vision supports the constraining of animated large-format signage outside of the 'Yonge Strip' Precinct and is reliant on the City in not permitting the proliferation of such signage into other areas of the City. However, it is also understood that there may be other locations within the BIA and elsewhere in the City where unique and creative approaches to signage currently exist or may be considered. While this Vision is specific to this area and not anticipated to be replicated in the same form, character and extent elsewhere, other studies may determine that there are opportunities for unique approaches to signage in other locations.