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Economic and Community Development Committee
10th floor, West Tower, City Hall
100 Queen Street West
Toronto, ON M5H 2N2

March 23, 2022

Re: EC28.8 – Little Jamaica Initiative – Master Plan and Aligned Initiatives: Introduction and Status Report

Dear Chair and Members,

Since being elected to represent a portion of Little Jamaica, I have worked closely with the community and the interdivisional team of City staff toward a comprehensive Little Jamaica Sustainability Plan. In September 2020, I moved a motion that by-and-large set the framework for the Little Jamaica Master Plan.

I am writing to respectfully articulate a number of important concerns and to provide thoughtful feedback on item EC28.8. For many years, Little Jamaica has been challenged by the potential loss of character, identity and commerce. Due to rising rents, construction of the Province's LRT project and the COVID-19 pandemic, a growing number of prominent and historic small businesses have been forced to shutter their doors. While these factors have certainly contributed to the challenges this community face, we must not discount the silent yet significant roles of gentrification, Black displacement, and cultural erasure. However, further to reviewing the report, I am disappointed that we are only at this stage with no clear timelines on achieving any deliverables while businesses continue to close.

Moreover, the report does not adequately address the crucial feedback the community has already provided to date. The clarion call of the community was that heritage tools be explored as part of the master plan towards protecting and preserving Little Jamaica. It is for this reason that I moved another motion in April 2021, requesting for a comprehensive heritage survey. Subsequent to this, I organized a number of community events with key stakeholders such as Black Urbanism TO, CP Planning, Reclaim Rebuild Eg. West, Oakwood-Vaughan residents, and Community Developer, Kojo Rakanwu Geb, where City staff were invited and in attendance.

At these engagements, the community asked for a transparent work plan with clear timelines on deliverables. However, to date, this has not been provided and the high expectations that a consultant would have been hired soon after my motion was approved at Council in 2020, to hit the ground running, were dashed as it took a year for the hiring process to be completed. We would have expected by now that there is a plan to implement the key priorities we have collectively discussed and not a plan for "another plan." That being said, I look forward to actively supporting the Program Advisor, Jay Pitter, in the creation of a transparent work plan that will empower the community and support the future of Little Jamaica for years to come.

I am, however, pleased to see that staff have moved on my recommendation to develop a Little Jamaica Accountability Table under the auspices of the Confronting Anti-Black Racism Unit's Partnership and Accountability Circle. This is a step in the right direction towards ensuring that the community are the drivers of this initiative with us being the vehicle.

Finally, I would respectfully recommend that a public Project Charter is developed with a clear assessment of goals, the responsibilities of each level of government, and specific timelines. Together, we have a historic opportunity to reverse the shameful legacy where racism in planning have led to African, Black and Caribbean communities being displaced. Toronto can be a model for the world by combining the words we express in support of inclusivity, multi-culturalism and combating Anti-Black Racism with substantive action. If we don't act now, it will be too late.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'J. Matlow', with a large, sweeping flourish extending to the right.

Councillor Josh Matlow
City Councillor
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www.joshmatlow.ca