



ST. LAWRENCE MARKET
NEIGHBOURHOOD BIA

April 14, 2022
RE: Market Street

To Toronto and East York Community Council,

Market Street, which has been completed as the first shared street in Toronto since 2014, has the opportunity to help change the nature of Toronto's streets moving forward and aid in the economic recovery of the St. Lawrence Market Neighbourhood and Old Town Toronto following the ravages of the last two years of the pandemic.

For the last eight years discussions have ensued on the permanent closure and pedestrianization of Market Street to stimulate growth, additional traffic and business to the Market and restaurants along the street as well as giving the best possible experience for the city. With the upcoming completion of the new North Market building, additional renovations to the Market overhang on the east side of the street, as well as a new proposed library to the south of the Market, the BIA believes that with the reopening of our commercial and residential operations, the time is now to pilot a 4-month seasonal closure from June to September to better study the concept and aid in the economic recovery of the area.

We have suggested a compromise time period of 4 months rather than a year for this initiative after consultation with the community.

Placemaking

Placemaking has become a much larger and integral initiative within the city. We have identified public needs to create more public space. This is an opportunity to facilitate such an initiative.

In 2011 the St. Lawrence Market was named the number 1 market in the world by National Geographic. Within that article, it stated that, "this farmers market emporium has operated since 1803, when it cohabited with Toronto's city hall. Redeveloped between the 1970s and 1990s after long neglect, the area's mix of homes and businesses showcases urban regeneration."

The Market again has the opportunity to become central in an integral opportunity to showcase its role as the early adopter and champion for renewal, urban regeneration and placemaking. The community has supported pedestrianization since Market Street was completed.

With Covid ravaging our communities over the past two years, innovation is the key to bring back our economy. We now have opportunity to take up the mantle.

In fact, since this article, the area has changed. There has been more focus on pedestrianization and a whole host of cycle tracks have popped up indicating the change in habits of the general public, how they move, and how they shop.



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As for closing the street, we have seen how successful the Mayors ActiveTO and CafeTo has been in bringing people out to walk and cycle the streets. Lakeshore became a popular spot as a new walking and cycling experience. Previous to the pandemic, the city authored its “Open Streets” program along Yonge and Bloor to great success. These initiatives do not have to be attached to any event or festival as time and time again, we have seen there has been a hunger for further public spaces to be used within the city. The time is now to extend that to Market Street.

Market Street would augment the cache of the Market and would be a draw to those with families, particularly those with young children and strollers, and seniors. Creating new shopping patterns are essential and growing untapped demographics can only enhance the shopping experience. And in lieu of further waves of Covid, this is a forward looking alternative to sharing our public spaces in safety for visitors and entire families as they make use of their “outdoor living rooms”.

Shopping, consumer habits, and segmenting of the entertainment dollar

Online shopping becoming more prevalent – particularly with younger generation – which gives them less impetus to engage and shop in person.

The entertainment and shopping dollar has been stretched to the maximum. With many options in this age, we must look to capture and entice our population.

If we are going to keep pace, we must realize that there are pop up markets sprouting everywhere, and the entertainment and food dollar spend has lots of options. We need something to continue to bring people to this place. While there may be an adjustment to the way people shop, the buzz and excitement of an enhanced venue will be a much larger draw.

There have been numerous success stories of closing streets such as in Montreal and Vancouver and we are looking to emulate their success. The creation of a specific draw will encourage people to stay and shop more than once, hang around to enjoy the area and benefit the area due to additional spending, and alternative options.

Residential and commercial populations

Within the last decade new development has brought in over 20,000 units to the area, with 10,000 more on the books. They are all within walking distance of Market Street. There is enough critical mass within the area and the local population alone to support the Market Street closure. We have to remember that people spend money – cars do not spend money.

The BIA as well has grown over the last few decades with over 1300 businesses available in the area and many retail and hospitality stakeholders available to the public.

The Market and area is also a regional draw. While Market Street might indeed lose 9-10 summer parking spaces, it is supported by its network of parking lots and garages. While the small number of parking spots



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have been helpful for quick short-term shopping in the market and accessibility, there are many alternatives that exist in the area, to ensure that this option is still available.

A cursory inventory of parking lots indicates that there are still many options close by. From 100 – 300 metres and a 3-minute walk there are around 2800 spots available, under 500 metres and a 5-minute walk there are around 1500 more spots available, and under an 800 metre and 10-minute walk there are around an additional 1800 spots available. So, we see that close accessible parking is still available for short trips in and out of the market.

The loss of the 10 parking spots on Market Street will have little effect on parking access and accessibility even to regional visitors to the market. If visitors are driving at least 30 minutes to visit the area it is unlikely that they will leave if there is no parking available directly next to the market. Parking on the street is not significant in relation to the neighbourhood inventory.

Accessibility and access

Accessibility still needs to be a major initiative moving forward. Pre-covid, there was little concern as all entrances on Market Street are accessible. This still is the case as confirmed by the residents' association through anecdotal evidence.

Has this changed since pre-covid? Further programs have been implemented since the pandemic including curbside pickup, loading, and unloading options. The BIA is committed to working with the Market and the community to facilitate any new or separate options to help this continue.

We will work with the Market and the restaurants to ensure that there are alternatives for pickup. Front St. Market Street and Esplanade all have possibilities, and accessibility was not an issue pre-covid and should not be so now.

I Heart Market Street

In 2021 the BIA initiated a pilot project called "I Heart Market Street" in which the street was closed for pedestrians for two consecutive weekends in August. Within the informal online survey of over 12100 respondents, the results were overwhelming.

- 95% said that pedestrianized streets are important or somewhat important in planning their day.
- If driving, 40 % park in lots, 17% park on the street and 43% do not arrive by car.
- The loss of parking on Market Street would not deter over 70% from shopping there again. For those drivers that might change their habits, there is still the opportunity to grab back a new and more robust demographic.
- 93% said that if the street were pedestrianized regularly or during the summer they would visit the street more often, lending credence to the fact that more spending would occur.
- 84% said they were in the neighbourhood or within 5 km. of Market Street.
- 96% wished that the weekends would have continued until the Thanksgiving weekend.



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- 94% supported a full summer closure for 2022.

From these results we can see there is much energy and anticipation for transforming this precinct into a pedestrianized area.

St. Lawrence Market support

The St. Lawrence Market and its vendors have been an integral part of our BIA are full participating BIA members and partners. As such we have run many support programs which have benefitted the Market vendors such as festivals and events and more recently, Covid programs to help stimulate sales during the downturn, as the Market had been deemed an essential service and open throughout the pandemic. It has been important to support all of our stakeholders and in particular our iconic anchor.

The vendors have been able to ply a trade throughout these last two years. Others have not been so lucky. The rest of the community has been closed – as have the restaurants on the west side of Market Street and are now looking to recover.

The community is looking to the city through its city real estate and city divisions to in turn give back to the community as the community has supported it over the last two years.

Animation

The BIA is committed to animating the street over its closure with both passive and active options. Options such as artisan markets, vendor participation, cultural events, music, buskers and more. We will take his opportunity to engage visors on a regular basis to help enhance the experience.

Oversite

To ensure ongoing oversite of Market Street, a working committee will be struck to review and make changes where needed on a regular basis through the input of local stakeholders in order to address both successes and failures of this initiative.

In conclusion we believe there is a case for closing Market Street for this summer program for this year and in advance of the potential pedestrianization of the precinct when it is fully developed. We would request that council adopt this report and help move the area into the future.

In short, we are not “closing” Market Street but rather OPENING it for public enjoyment.

Yours Truly,

Al Smith
Executive Director
St. Lawrence Market Neighbourhood BIA