

A large red geometric graphic in the top left corner, consisting of several overlapping triangles and rectangles in various shades of red, creating a dynamic, abstract shape.

Toronto City Hall
100 Queen Street West
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Toronto, ON M5H 2N2

January 16, 2023

Attention: Councillor Gary Crawford, Chair, Budget Committee

Dear Cllr Crawford and Members of the Budget Committee,

This letter is submitted in support of Mayor John Tory's 2023 budget and specifically its focus on community safety and well-being. Downtown Yonge Business improvement Area (DYBIA) BIA believes that economic recovery is underpinned by community safety, and for our downtown neighbourhood, we applaud the commitment of 25 additional police officers to the downtown Priority Response Units (PRU), along with the continued funding and expansion of the Toronto Community Crisis Service.

DYBIA, with a membership of some 2,000 businesses and property owners and a combined commercial property value of \$7.2 billion, is one of the City's largest BIAs and is located in the busy Yonge-Dundas area of downtown Toronto. We view community safety and well-being as foundational to economic recovery and neighbourhood quality of life, and believe it requires a multi-sectoral and collaborative lens that brings together all community stakeholders.

As part of our commitment to those goals, we have funded a full-time crisis outreach team called the Community Engagement Team (CET) since Summer 2018. Our police partners at 51 and 52 Divisions have been part of this partnered outreach from the beginning, both as part of the award-winning Walkabout, an Elder-led street outreach program and the CET itself. The CET interacted with clients on the street almost 3,800 times in 2022 and provided on-street services like counselling and wellness checks more than 2,500 times. Referrals were made in 16% of interactions, often to shelter, food or harm reduction programs. In addition, the team responded to 138 non-violent crisis calls, mainly from streetfront businesses.

During the pandemic, we pivoted to include a partnered outreach model to best use the outreach resources available. The CET works with a range of partners in Downtown Yonge to provide several collaborative, on-street outreach sessions each week. During 2022, we undertook 208 partnered outreach sessions over 49 weeks with eight different, regular partners including various social agencies, harm reduction and housing workers and the Yonge Neighbourhood Community Officers (NCOs).

While our commitment to our most vulnerable community members is unwavering, Downtown Yonge is increasingly perceived as a neighbourhood that is unsafe – a serious reputational risk that compromises the health and well-being of our residents, employees, businesses, visitors and students as well as those seeking services.

The rise in behaviours related to substance use, mental illness, poverty and homelessness on-street – compounded and magnified by the pandemic – negatively impacts on perceptions of safety and inclusion of Downtown Yonge. We increasingly see open drug use, erratic and aggressive behaviours, shootings, assaults on retail and security staff in the area as well as the victimization of extremely vulnerable people who are on-street because of these same social challenges.

DYBIA has conducted an annual *Safe & Inclusive Streets Survey* since 2018, which seeks input from residents, students, business and property owners, social agencies, employees and visitors to the neighbourhood. The Fall 2022 survey highlighted significant concerns:

- Since March 2022, 38% of respondents feel safety in Downtown Yonge has gotten worse or much worse.
- Notably, 66% of respondents reported that vandalism, graffiti and deliberate damage to property was a very or fairly big problem in the neighbourhood – a 17% increase since 2018.
- Furthermore, business and property owners reported a higher victimization rate – more than 47% (compared to 25% in the 2021 survey) of business and property owners have been the victim of theft and 19% (compared to 14% in the 2021 survey) the victim of violent crime.



- Almost half of business and property owners have likewise witnessed a violent incident in the preceding 12-month period.
- More than 40% of all respondents – including residents, visitors, employees and students as well as business and property owners - had witnessed a violent crime in the preceding 12 months.

In short, we see social challenges getting worse at the same time that crime and perceptions of safety are getting worse. We believe strongly that these issues of safety and inclusion need to be tackled collaboratively and through active partnerships that include social agencies, residents' groups, police, schools and the business community.

We note that many of our business and property owner members, as well as other community stakeholders, feel unable to talk about the negative consequences of shelter programs or harm reduction programs for fear of a potential backlash and sanction and accusations of NIMBYism. The impact of expressing concerns in public is also one of reputational risk, a deterrent to visitors and shoppers coming to Downtown Yonge and something that our members are justifiably concerned about – especially after almost two years of lockdowns.

Finally, although we are seeing some promising signs of economic recovery, the Office Occupancy Index for the downtown core, as reported by Strategic Regional Research Alliance (SRRA), remains at 38% as at December 15, 2022 – a concern for many businesses that depend on foot traffic for their survival.

As always, DYBIA stands ready and willing to play our part in both economic recovery and community safety and well-being:

- We are working with the City's 10-year community safety and well-being program, SafeTO, on a pilot partnership to address business safety concerns in the city;
- We have developed a Nine-Point Action Plan (attached) to support our advocacy efforts with all levels of government;
- We will continue to invest in crisis outreach which we have done since 2018;
- In partnership with the BIA Office at the City, we will continue to offer de-escalation training for streetfront businesses throughout Toronto as we have done since 2020;

- We will continue to participate in the Yonge-Dundas operations and leadership tables;
- We will continue to provide resources for those seeking access to social programs and to those wondering how to report different incidents.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit this letter in support of the Budget's focus on community safety and well-being, and economic recovery.

Sincerely



Pauline Larsen

Executive Director & Chief Operating Officer



DOWNTOWN YONGE SAFETY AND INCLUSION: 9-POINT ACTION PLAN

1 Coordinated service delivery

End the silos – all relevant agencies and departments, at all levels, must work together

- Education, prevention, treatment, rehabilitation, supportive housing and law enforcement are integral components in a holistic approach.
- Police and outreach workers must work in tandem to get people the help they need.
- Municipal, federal and provincial roles need to be interconnected – not an excuse for deflecting responsibility.

Immediate Action

- City and Province: Create a multi-jurisdictional Focused Intervention Team, to ensure timely access to treatment for those most in need.

2 Wrap-around services – not harm reduction alone

Stop treating harm reduction as an isolated focus

- Harm reduction facilities are inadequate – and ineffective – without the necessary wrap-around services to support them. Otherwise this is little more than harm *deferral*, creating a “revolving door” of repeat use.
- Without effective wrap-around services, not only do individuals not get the long-term help they need, harm reduction facilities become magnets for illegal activities and negatively impact experiences in the surrounding neighbourhood.
- The recognized four pillars of harm reduction services must *all* be in place:
 1. Supervised consumption.
 2. Partnership with law enforcement, to prevent exploitation of the vulnerable and keep the surrounding community safe.
 3. Prevention and education programs, to keep usage from starting in the first place.
 4. Access to treatment – detox and rehab facilities available when needed.

Immediate Action

- City: Review all harm reduction operations, with timelines for ensuring all four pillars are in place at each location.
- Province: Address need for urgent access to treatment facilities.

3 Expedite relocation of the current SIS; prioritize community safety around re-development of the former Bond Hotel

Tourism and culture are *experiential*

- Midway between a high tourist area, a university and a Grade 3-12 school is no place for a supervised injection site. Moving it (closer to where medical support is immediately available) must happen urgently. Recovery will be hampered as long as the facility remains where it is.



- Similarly, redevelopment of the former Bond Hotel at 65 Dundas St. E. for affordable and supportive housing must prioritize community safety – applying the four-pillar model outlined above, as well as Duty of Care principles for community safety and wellbeing, and ensuring mental health and addiction services are in place.
- The ongoing success of this area depends on a strong sense of safety and security for visitors, workers and residents.
- With the addition of Little Canada along with Yonge-Dundas Square, theatres and other attractions, Downtown Yonge is crucial to Toronto’s economic recovery. Image and perceptions matter – this is the worst possible place to locate permanent social services infrastructure.

Immediate Action

- City: Expedite relocation of The Works; apply the four-pillar model and Duty of Care principles to redevelopment of 65 Dundas St. E.
- Province: Assist in determining locations for harm reduction and support services; commit to support for mental health and addiction services at 65 Dundas St. E.

4 Distribute support services across the GTA

Social services should not be concentrated in one area

- Intensive social service supports are disproportionately located in the downtown core / downtown east areas. They should be decentralized, which would enable more stable delivery and ease the strain on downtown neighbourhoods.
- Social services – including supportive housing, and addiction and mental health facilities – should be equitably distributed across the Greater Toronto Area.

Immediate Action

- City: Map current service delivery and establish a task force to identify locations to distribute equitably across GTA.

5 Objective, unbiased data

Establish consistent definitions, metrics and evaluation criteria

- Create an independent agency to compile, track and analyze data about street involvement, homelessness, drug use, crime.
- Eliminate confirmation bias and self-interested data collection.
- Base decisions and actions on neutral, empirical evidence.
- Show all the data – even when it’s bad news.

Immediate Action

- City: Establish an arm’s length research agency to define, compile, analyze and report on relevant data. Partnership with existing consulting firms could be considered to draw on expertise.



6 Enforce the law

No exceptions for violent crime

- Regardless of an individual's situation, criminal and provincial offences must be prosecuted.
- Social services and law enforcement must work together – helping the vulnerable while targeting and prosecuting traffickers and gang-related crime.

Immediate Action

- City: Working with Police Services, determine agreed-upon definitions of “violent crime” (including drug trafficking and gang-related activities) and issue a public statement that, without exception, these behaviours will be prosecuted.

7 Proportional resource allocation

Unique demands in Downtown Yonge require targeted approaches

- Pre-pandemic, Downtown Yonge had more foot traffic and activity than most other parts of Toronto – requiring more resources to maintain safety, security and cleanliness.
- COVID-19 was a major tipping point, exacerbating the need for proportionally higher resources.
- Economic recovery will radiate out from the city centre.
- Clarity is needed around Section 37 funds, to ensure timely decisions based on demonstrated economic and community priorities.
- Local BIAs and other community organizations should have direct input into resource allocation decisions.

Immediate Action

- City: Establish two finance committees:
 - 1) To identify and allocate resources specific to Downtown Yonge.
 - 2) To create clearer guidelines for Section 37 funds, including when and how the funds are spent.

8 Measure outcomes

Track investments, objectives and results

- All levels of government are contributing public funds toward community safety programs and initiatives, but these investments are piecemeal. They need to be more strategic, targeted and cohesive.
- Accountability is critical to ensure that investments address root causes and street-related issues.
- Specific outcomes need to be tracked on an individual basis – monitoring action taken for each individual, whether it has been effective and if further intervention is needed.
- Measuring inputs – money spent, staff time, meetings/consultations, number of outreach engagements – is meaningless without also tracking whether they make a positive difference.

Immediate Action

- City: Directive to all City departments that plans for street-related action must include specific intended outcomes and timelines, and mechanisms to measure effectiveness in achieving the desired objectives.
- Province/Federal: Similar directives from provincial and federal Finance ministries as part of the annual budget process.



9 Decisions based on reality, not ideology

Treat individuals as individuals, not symbols

- Provide help for those who need it and prosecute those who exploit them.
- Engage with communities to move forward inclusively, not focusing solely on the needs of one part of the population.
- Exercise duty of care for everyone.

Immediate Action

- City: Base all decisions around street-related issues on direction from the research agency and outcome measurement process.