

# Toronto Nightlife Action Plan



City of Toronto ///  
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND CULTURE  
2019



# Toronto Nightlife Action Plan

The nighttime economy is the new competitive edge for post-industrial cities. Local governments are starting to invest in planning the nighttime economy with the same attention that has been given to the daytime economy. Amsterdam, London, New York, Berlin and Paris are all introducing measures to develop their entertainment and related activities at night.

## 01

### **PLAN** *THE NIGHT*



## 02

### **PROTECT** *THE NIGHT*



## 03

### **CREATE** *THE NIGHT*



## Vision

Toronto's nightlife is safe, respectful, accepting, inclusive and positive. The city's diverse residents and tourists from around the world enjoy a vibrant nightlife in Toronto that includes live music, entertainment and social culture. The City of Toronto coordinates municipal services, planning and policies to strengthen 24-hour creative activity with a particular focus on developing emerging entertainment areas outside the downtown core.

## Introduction

The Toronto Nightlife Action Plan is a coordinated approach to questions that continue to arise about the "other 9 to 5" over the next three years. It outlines the scope of nightlife, takes stock of the city's nightlife economic contribution and creative footprint, and recommends three bold goals for Toronto: plan the night, protect the night, and create the night.

The purpose of this action plan is to consider the opportunities of proactively planning the city at night. As communities grapple with how to transform their post-industrial economies, nighttime is the new barometer for a successful creative city. A city's nightlife signals whether or not a place is safe, affordable, equitable and innovative. This plan is important for independent businesses operating at night and the community as a whole. Nighttime businesses need daytime local government services just as much as any other business. The key to changing mindsets about nighttime activity is recognizing that by investing in the nighttime economy, it will likely strengthen the city's daytime economy and overall livability.



## What is Nightlife?

The nighttime economy describes the social, cultural and economic activities that take place between 6 p.m. and 6 a.m. At its broadest, it can include any type of work from manufacturing, food processing plants, late-night office work, cleaning services, goods transportation and emergency health services – in addition to cultural activities more commonly perceived as nighttime economic drivers such as live music, theatre and comedy.

Nightlife is one part of the nighttime economy.

Nightlife describes a range of consumption experiences through leisure, live entertainment and cultural activities that take place between 6 p.m. and 6 a.m. Nightlife can happen in a variety of spaces such as restaurants, pubs, nightclubs, casinos, sports stadiums, arenas, concert halls, music venues, performance spaces, multiplex cinemas, virtual reality (VR) arcades, theatres, festivals, galleries, and – increasingly – non-traditional or “alternative” cultural spaces. Nightlife contributes to the economy by generating jobs and attracting tourists that bring new money into the city's economy. It also offers social and cultural benefits such as connecting people through live experiences, fostering a sense of community and belonging, creating vibrant scenes and incubating talent.

## ABOUT THIS REPORT

### People

The plan presented here is informed by stakeholder consultations through interviews, group meetings and emails with: residents; musicians, music venue operators, music promoters; do-it-yourself (DIY) producers, stand-up comedians, theatre producers; restaurant operators; nightclub managers; entertainment solicitors; tourism, hospitality, music, performing arts, and resident associations; university and college students and professors; safety associations; Toronto Public Health; Toronto Police Service; Toronto City Planning, Economic Development and Culture, Municipal Licensing and Standards, Solid Waste Management, Toronto Transportation Services; and Toronto Transit Commission.

### Process

The City of Toronto adopted the Toronto Music Strategy developed by the Toronto Music Advisory Council in 2016. This set the stage for new support for the local music sector. In 2017-2018, Economic Development and Culture (EDC) began a consultation process with about ninety people on a night mayor ambassador program and the nighttime economy.

In 2018, the Responsible Hospitality Institute (RHI) with Toronto Association for Business Improvement Areas (TABIA), Ryerson University and led a Hospitality Zone Assessment of Toronto's downtown entertainment districts called Toronto Sociable City at Night. In the same year, EDC led a study analyzing the challenges for DIY EVENTS to access space in Toronto.

The Toronto Nightlife Action Plan builds on this extensive research and community involvement.



# Taking Stock of Toronto's Nightlife

## Economic Contribution and Creative Footprint

The economic and cultural value of live music, entertainment, culture and culinary arts in a city should not be underestimated. For example, Edmonton found that the economic impact stemming from their late-night entertainment economy was \$1.4 billion in 2014. In the United States of America, a study of New York City's nighttime economy reported that it had an economic output of \$19.1 billion (USD) in 2016. In Toronto, there are about 8,000 licensed establishments of which 483 are bars, 243 are live music venues and 26 are nightclubs. In 2017, Toronto welcomed over 43.7 million visitors that spent \$8.8 billion. A record 15.5 million were overnight visitors.

The business of nightlife also employs people. The Toronto region's nightlife employs people in many sectors including 64,000 workers in the food and beverage sector, 32,000 employees in the hotel industry and 178,000 workers in culture sector. The cultural sector includes live performing arts, visual arts, written and published works, audio-visual and interactive media, and sound recording. The cultural products and services produced by these activities are often consumed at night. Nightlife activities also commonly drive tourism and tourist spending – and Toronto is the leading tourism destination in Canada.

Toronto's nightlife offers its diverse residents' and tourists extraordinary culinary scenes, many festival and events, and exciting live music and entertainment options throughout the year. Toronto's downtown offers a walkable area where convention attendees can enjoy a show, a meal, a drink and live music at night. The city's creative footprint includes large-scale downtown venues that draw huge event-based evening crowds such as the Scotiabank Arena, Massey Hall, TIFF Bell Lightbox, and Rebel Entertainment Complex. Toronto is also home to many world-class festivals, live theatres, professional sports teams and dozens of grassroots music venues where emerging talents perform for devoted, mostly younger audiences.

Data Sources: *Edmonton's Late Night Entertainment Economy: Economic Impact Assessment*, Office of the Chief Economist, Responsible Hospitality, 2016; *NYC's Nightlife Economy Impact, Assets, and Opportunities*, Commissioned by The Mayor's Office of Media and Entertainment by The North Highland Company, Econsult Solutions, Inc. (ESI), and Urbane Development, 2019; Toronto Municipal Licensing and Standards, 2018 and 2019; *World Cities Culture Report 2018*, page 140; Toronto Music Directory, 2018; Tourism Toronto, 2018; City of Toronto; Greater Toronto Hotel Association; Statistics Canada.



# /// 01 PLAN THE NIGHT //



## FIRST GOAL:

**Toronto will support live music, entertainment, and social culture at night that reflects the diversity of the city and enhances the global position of Toronto as a tourist destination and cultural innovator.**

The nighttime economy is one of Toronto's defining characteristics as a big and growing city. The City of Toronto already directly invests in many large-scale nighttime cultural programs such as Nuit Blanche, culinary arts and not-for-profit performing arts through Toronto Arts Council. The City also recognizes that much of the exciting and innovative nightlife activities that take place in Toronto are led by independent creative entrepreneurs working in do-it-yourself (DIY) spaces, live music venues and nightclubs.

As Toronto's population grows, nightlife offerings need to adapt to this change. Through consultations, residents said they would like to see more to do at night that responds to the various *lifestyle choices* and diverse cultures in Toronto. This enhancement could include expanding the number of activities at night that are not just about drinking alcohol, creating more packaged cultural events, and encouraging cultural institutions to program past 9 p.m. To encourage a successful nightlife, the City of Toronto should establish a City lead and a mechanism to align City services. By proactively planning the night, Toronto is joining cities around the world that invest in nightlife to enhance their international reputation.

## CITY OF TORONTO ACTIONS:

- 1.1 Request the Mayor designate a Member of Council as Toronto's Night Ambassador, to be the voice for Toronto's entertainment-related activities for the 2018 to 2022 term of Council.
- 1.2 Report back to City Council on the key priorities of a nighttime operations working group that consists of invited participation from senior staff in Municipal Licensing and Standards, City Planning, Transportation Services and other relevant City divisions in 2020.
- 1.3 Report back to City Council on advice from nightlife and creative sector for-profit and not-for-profit enterprises, do-it-yourself event organizers, and equity-seeking groups such as youth, women and LGBTQ2S on best practices to enhance inclusive social culture across Toronto at night in 2020.
- 1.4 Pilot an arts event permit to host pop up performances in unconventional spaces.
- 1.5 Organize a free annual Toronto Nightlife Industry Town Hall with the private sector and community partners within a year, and annually thereafter, to help set priorities.

## /// 02 PROTECT THE NIGHT //////////////////////////////////////



### **SECOND GOAL:**

**Toronto will recognize and advance the importance of safety for nightlife patrons and workers, respect for residents and the long-term sustainability of music and entertainment venues.**

Keeping people safe from harm or injury at night is a primary concern for everybody involved in nightlife. Many City services including Toronto Public Health, Toronto Paramedic Services, Municipal Licensing and Standards, Fire Services, Toronto Police Service actively prevent and respond to health issues that happen at night. Because of their excellent work, Toronto is a city that continually ranks high in terms of tourists' perceptions of safety.

It is important to keep Toronto's nightlife safe and find ways to improve, as expanding the range of people who participate in nighttime activities increases safety at night. Being safe is connected with health, including getting a good night's sleep. Ensuring that local residents are not disturbed by unreasonable late-night activity is an important part of a balanced plan.

Protecting the night also means updating City policies and regulations to ensure that the venues where nighttime activities occur can continue to exist. Toronto's "Agent of Change" process protects existing music venues from conflicts that might arise with occupants of newly constructed residential buildings nearby. During 2018, the Toronto Music Office reviewed and provided comments on many development applications, alerting City planners to the presence of nearby music venues, requiring developers to include advisory clauses about nightlife activity on offers of purchase and lease, and notifying venues likely to be affected by nearby developments. Toronto's Noise Bylaw – which has been challenging for music venues, music festivals, and the artists they support – will be replaced on October 1, 2019. The new Noise Bylaw will be more objective and effective for the entire music community. More work is needed to address the regulatory dilemma of licensing live music venues.

### **CITY OF TORONTO ACTIONS:**

- 2.1 Align the review of zoning and business licensing regulations to clarify the requirements for venues regularly presenting live music and report back in 2020.
- 2.2 Work with relevant City divisions, Toronto nightlife leaders and residents to develop a safer venue industry guide that incorporates safer spaces best practices, information on responsible consumption and safe working environments.
- 2.3 Work with relevant City divisions, Toronto nightlife leaders and residents to develop a list of good neighbour principles for late-night businesses that is based on best practices around the world and adapted for Toronto.



## /// 03 CREATE THE NIGHT ///



### **THIRD GOAL:**

**Toronto is a 24-hour city that harnesses the potential of the entertainment-related nighttime economy as a producer of jobs and economic growth.**

In Toronto, the local audience has an insatiable appetite for nightlife offerings that is fuelled by the city's talented artists and entrepreneurs. Businesses mentioned that nightlife amenities are an advantage to attracting talented people and are often considered a benefit of working in a "24-hour" employment area like downtown.

However, the post-industrial conditions that led to a downtown nightlife in Toronto years ago no longer exist: a primarily office core that is unoccupied at night, under-utilized buildings, low rents, and ample parking lots nearby. If Toronto wants a vibrant nightlife to continue into the future, it needs to develop a new approaches to balancing mixed-use zoning, a growing downtown residential population, high rents and lack of parking with nighttime activities.

This means using the City's resources effectively to identify and support emerging entertainment areas outside the downtown core that with a few zoning tweaks can support nightlife uses. It also means actively designing public realm lighting around nightlife activity to support safety and ensuring people can get around the city through late-night transportation. To keep track of this transformation of the city at night, the City of Toronto must also count the number of people working at night and the economic contribution of that activity. Together, these actions will make Toronto's nightlife a truly great experience for all.

### **CITY OF TORONTO ACTIONS:**

3.1 Identify emerging entertainment areas outside the downtown core that can support entertainment uses at night and the future growth of nightlife in Toronto and report back to City Council on potential opportunities and approaches in 2020.

3.2 Explore opportunities for additional transportation options specific to the nighttime economy and report back in 2020.

Photos. Cover page: The Roots, PANAMANIA Live @ Nathan Phillips Square, Toronto 2015; Page 3: Serena Ryder, PANAMANIA Live @ Nathan Phillips Square, Toronto 2015; Page 4: Soup, Winterlicious Toronto; Page 5: "Ocean" Philip Beesley Architect Inc. Sculptures and Projects, Nuit Blanche Toronto, 2016; Page 6: "International Dumpling Festival" by Ken Lum, Nuit Blanche Toronto, 2018; Page 7: "Celebrating 150 years of Canadian Cuisine" at Casa Loma, Winterlicious Toronto, 2017.