



September 20, 2023

Members of the Economic & Community Development Committee
City of Toronto, City Hall
100 Queen Street West
Toronto, Ontario M5H 2N2

Re: Sept. 21 2023 Meeting - Item EC6.3 – Support for Toronto’s Restaurants

Dear Members of the Economic & Community Development Committee,

My name is Howard Tam and I am the Founder and Foodie-in-Chief of Eat More Scarborough Food Tours. We are a culinary tourism company that focuses on and aims to celebrate Scarborough’s many diverse restaurants and eateries where the food quality and flavour is second to none.

A fair amount of the reports before you today talk a lot about how to support restaurants outside the Downtown Core, especially in places like Scarborough. As one of the only culinary tourism enterprises that operates outside the Core and is focused on Scarborough, we naturally wanted to offer our thoughts into some of these issues and propose some ideas that might help inform your discussion.

It is true that many of the City’s support programs like the “Licious” programs or CaféTO do not find much resonance in the suburbs. A lot of this due to the geographies, land ownership and business models. Many suburban streets do not tend to have business strips like the central part of the city that encourage walking and makes for a pleasant patio environment. Restaurants in the suburbs are often in private land, being inside strip plazas and shopping malls, where CaféTO doesn’t generally apply. Further, as the report identifies, many suburban restaurants are quick serve or take out and do not conform to the 3 course model that is part of the “Licious” programs.

We definitely feel that the City of Toronto needs to really dig into and understand the barriers and challenges that these particular contexts present and how they play out for the lived experience of a restaurant owner – so that the right solutions can be found. As an organization that works closely with restaurants in Scarborough, we would be more than happy to offer our support and insights should the City choose to study these issues in more detail.

We also think that beyond direct policy or financial assistance, there is a much bigger opportunity that could really help suburban restaurants that hasn’t been discussed in too much detail in these reports – and that is Culinary Tourism. What is really amazing about many restaurants in the suburbs (and what they are really good at) is their deep commitment to quality, detail and to delivering tastes true to where the chef or restaurant owner comes from. I will venture to say that nowhere else on Earth has there ever been such a diverse combination, dedication to quality and craft coming from the most humble and friendliest chefs and restaurateurs than there are right now in Toronto’s suburbs. We literally have the entire world of five-star quality food and drink right at our doorstep.

We know this because we take people out to these restaurants all the time – and the look of satisfaction and surprise when they try something they have never tested before happens almost every time. We know this because we hear about chefs from around the world who



are coming here to try this food. And if you still don't believe me, we invite you to join us on a food tour anytime to see this for yourself!

And this is a story worth sharing with all Torontonians, Canadians and anybody coming to visit our city. Which is exactly what Culinary Tourism is all about. As Food Tour Guides, we are storytellers – we help fill in the story & experience gaps where restaurants (who are often very busy focusing on their craft) leave off. We help to create a more accessible environment for folks to try new dishes from different cultures - something that we have noticed can be intimidating for many people. We help create memorable experiences – even at quick serve or takeout restaurants – that is supported by stories of the food, restauranteurs and history of cuisine that help people appreciate what they are trying – and once they taste the quality – we know that they are coming back. (You can see some of these stories and experiences on our Instagram: [@eatmorescarborough](https://www.instagram.com/eatmorescarborough))

Which is why we would like to encourage the City of Toronto to consider developing a Culinary Tourism Strategy focused on the suburbs that encourages people to get out, explore what is out there and can support the development of a stronger Culinary Tourism sector so that there can be more storytelling going on. The Find Dining program was definitely a great start on this front – but we need something more comprehensive that also includes support for the Culinary Tourism sector.

We know the success of food tourism will drive more business to suburban restaurants. We've seen it happen on our tours – again and again we get folks who say things like “I've driven by this place for years - but never thought to stop – thank you for showing me this - now I'm definitely coming back!”

What we have in Toronto is a suburban food scene like no other. Let's definitely seize the moment and tell the world about this amazing experience that is just waiting to be explored!

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "HTam".

Howard Tam
Founder and Foodie-in-Chief