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April 30, 2024

Economic & Community Development Committee
100 Queen Street West
Toronto, ON M5H 2N2

Supporting Small Business Operators in Little Jamaica

Dear Chair & Committee Members,

I am writing to request your support for small businesses in the Little Jamaica community.

The Eglinton West corridor is a commercial main street that has been of great cultural heritage significance to the City of Toronto as a distinct ethnic and cultural hub for Caribbean and African immigrants for many decades. Commonly known as both “Little Jamaica” and “Eglinton”, the area is recognized for the clusters of Black-owned businesses of cultural relevance including barber shops, restaurants specializing in Caribbean cuisine, Black aesthetics and hair shops, recording studios, and music stores. The corridor plays an important role as a commercial and cultural destination for both local residents and visitors from other parts of the city and the surrounding GTA.

Economic challenges have grown with the start of the LRT construction in 2011, with historic small Black businesses having closed, or are at risk of shutting their doors due to rising affordability challenges in the area. As part of the Little Jamaica Cultural District Study, residents have continued to voice concerns regarding issues of displacement, affordability and cultural importance of the businesses along Eglinton Avenue West. To support the area, City Council adopted two separate motions at [their meeting on September 30, 2020](#) that direct staff, amongst other tasks, to develop economic measures to help businesses experiencing challenges in Little Jamaica, using an equity lens that recognizes the cultural heritage of the area.

Establishing commercial community land trusts could support communities and address their challenges, helping ensure long-term/permanent community ownership of commercial spaces to mitigate displacement and strengthen access to affordable, culturally relevant retail. However, the City of Toronto Act limits the City’s ability to sell or lease lands at below market values/rents due to the anti-bonusing provisions in Section 82. One of the exceptions to this principle is the establishment and administering of a Community Improvement Plan, a mechanism enabled by Section 28

of the Planning Act that allows municipalities to provide direct support to property owners and businesses within a specified geography.

Community Improvement Plans are intended to encourage revitalization initiatives and/or stimulate development and redevelopment. Once implemented, they allow municipalities to provide tax assistance, grants or loans to assist in the revitalization of lands and/or buildings within the defined Community Improvement Project Area. They also allow Council to sell, lease or otherwise dispose of any land acquired or held by it in the Community Improvement Project Area to any person or governmental authority for use in conformity with the Community Improvement Plan. The City currently uses Community Improvement Plans to encourage brownfield redevelopment, incentivizing the construction of new job-generating space, and to revitalize retail businesses.

Aligned with the draft [Framework to Advance Inclusive Economic Development in Toronto](#) approach, the attached motion advances a Community Improvement Plan, and other potential measures, in Little Jamaica. This would help create a framework to support the area's equity deserving entrepreneurs. This measure is also aligned with previous Council direction, such as [EC29.8 - Commercial Property Ownership Mechanisms in Little Jamaica](#) and [EX12.4 - Long-Term Financial Plan Update: Leveraging City-Wide Real Estate Opportunities for Affordable Housing, Complete Communities and Financial Sustainability](#).

Thank you for your consideration.

Recommendation:

1. Economic and Community Development Committee request that the General Manager, Economic Development & Culture, in consultation with the Chief Financial Officer and Treasurer and the Chief Planner and Executive Director, City Planning to report back to the appropriate Committee prior to City Council's consideration of the Mayor's proposed 2025 budget with recommendations on the feasibility of economic development initiatives, including grants for commercial businesses and commercial community land trusts, and acquiring below market space through the development process to support culturally and historically significant businesses in Little Jamaica, as part of the Cultural Districts Program and Little Jamaica Cultural District Program report.

Sincerely,

Councillor Josh Matlow
Ward 12, Toronto – St. Paul's.