



March 27, 2024

TO: the members of the Economic and Community Development Committee

Chair, Councillor Alejandra Bravo

Vice-Chair, Councillor Shelley Carroll

and Councillor Paula Fletcher, Councillor Ausma Malik, Councillor Chris Moise, Councillor Jaye Robinson

Re: *Item - 2024.EC11.4 - Alcohol in Parks Pilot: Evaluation Findings*

Comments for distribution to the Committee ahead of the Economic and Community Development Committee meeting, March 28, 2024

Dear Committee Members,

I, Emily Reid, am writing to express my support of the Alcohol in Parks Pilot Project and this programme's future, both as a local resident of the Christie Pits neighbourhood, and in my capacity as a presenter of public arts programming in City of Toronto Parks.

I am the Artistic & Executive Director of Toronto Outdoor Picture Show (or "TOPS"), a 13 year-old charitable organization that curates and presents free, accessible outdoor cinema programming in public parks across Toronto. I founded this organization out of a love for public parks and public programming. As a local resident who lives as a renter of an apartment without access to outdoor space, parks are where I socialize during the warm weather season – particularly since the emergence of COVID-19, and at times when dining in a restaurant is too cost prohibitive for my financial means.

I am in full support of the decriminalization of alcohol consumption in public parks, and I hope all City of Toronto parks will eventually become permanent locations where people can legally consume alcoholic beverages, following the lead of many cities around the world. I am pleased to learn that the city's pilot project was very successful, and demonstrated a common sense conclusion: people already consume alcohol in public parks, and the pilot did not alter their behaviour.

In August 2023, TOPS presented public events in two pilot parks, Christie Pits and Corktown Common, and did not observe any changes in the behaviour of people who use these parks (whether to attend cinema events or to use the park for any other reason). That month, we surveyed 443 attendees of our events in those parks, to gauge their reception to the pilot project. Notably:

- 70% of respondents agreed with the statement "Being able to enjoy an alcoholic drink in the park improved my park experience"; 20% were neutral.
- 83% said they'd be likely to purchase an alcoholic beverage from TOPS at least one evening next summer, if TOPS were permitted to sell.



As members of the Economic and Community Development Committee, I am requesting that you consider expanding the pilot to serve other needs, as well. You are surely aware that arts organizations and festivals are in financial crisis, as our costs continue to rise while public funding decreases. We need other sources of revenue. At present, if we want to sell alcohol at our park events, we have to gate and perimeter these spaces, which is contrary to our mandate to present programming without barriers to entry, and contrary to the city's alcohol pilot that allows people to consume their own beverages. TOPS wants this committee to consider ways to remove these impediments to our financial recovery, to allow organizations such as ours to sell alcohol at our public events without causing them to be gated, exclusive and policed. There is precedent for this sort of change: in 2021, the provincial government allowed craft breweries to sell alcoholic beverages at farmers markets in public spaces, a change designed to alleviate financial stress on small businesses.

I would be very pleased to provide any additional information that you may need to further your continued discussions.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Emily Reid". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a prominent initial "E".

Emily Reid
Artistic & Executive Director, Toronto Outdoor Picture Show
Ward 11
B-723 Bloor St West, M6G 1L5
ereid@topictureshow.com