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Budget Committee

City of Toronto

100 Queen Street West, 10th Floor, West Tower

Toronto, ON M5H 2N2

January 20, 2025

Attention: Councillor Shelley Carroll
Chair, Budget Committee

By email: buc@toronto.ca

Dear Councillor Carroll and members of the Budget Committee,

This letter is submitted to support investment in urban revitalization initiatives in the City generally and Downtown Yonge specifically, including spending on community safety, cleanliness, improved transit service, and tackling traffic congestion as per the proposed 2025 City of Toronto Budget.

Downtown Yonge Business Improvement Area (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. We also note that Downtown Yonge supports activities that generate more than \$850 million in annual fiscal revenues for different levels of government, including, among other things, commercial property taxes.

We believe that economic success is founded on community safety and wellbeing, and our submission today highlights this focus.



Downtown Yonge takes a very intentional and collaborative approach to community safety and well-being. We have funded a full-time crisis and outreach program called the Community Engagement Team (CET) since Summer 2018. Our police partners at 51 and 52 Divisions have been part of this program from the beginning. We also coordinate partnered outreach, initiated during the pandemic, to maximise access to resources for clients on-street. The CET continues to work with a range of partners in Downtown Yonge to provide several collaborative, on-street outreach sessions each week. Since 2021, we have undertaken weekly outreach with eight different, regular partners including various social agencies, harm reduction and housing workers, TTC Special Constables and the Yonge Neighbourhood Community Officers (NCOs).

We would like to acknowledge several achievements on the part of the City in the past year, and underscore our support for these initiatives in the 2025 Budget – as well as highlight some areas that we believe more funding.

- We applaud the launch of the innovative CORE Program, a proactive, street outreach pilot led by Toronto Public health nurses and supported by specially-trained police officers.
- We support the establishment of a HART Hub by the City in the Downtown East and would like to specifically applaud the focus on recovery and treatment.
- We support the 3.9% increase in the Toronto Police Service budget, notably in the face of increased public demonstrations in our neighbourhood and the City at large.
- We support the work being done by both SafeTO and the City's Encampment Team to reduce vulnerability the downtown specifically, and the city more broadly.



- We applaud the launch in Fall 2024 of the Toronto Community Crisis Service as a city-wide, 24/7 non-police mental health crisis response. We believe this provides an important alternative to a police call, while also reducing calls to police.

Despite these efforts, and while our commitment to our most vulnerable community members is unwavering, Downtown Yonge is increasingly perceived as a neighbourhood that is unsafe. This is 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, unsafe encampments in parks, 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.

Our annual *Safe & Inclusive Neighbourhood Survey 2024* (an annual survey we have undertaken since 2018), confirms that a large proportion of people in the area are worried about being a victim of crime: including visitors (64%), residents (76%), employees (73%) and business owners (77%). For our business owners in particular, this fear is borne out – some 26% of the business owners who responded to the survey reported that they had been a victim of a violent crime in the past 12 months.

Note that 55% of the incidents of violent victimization occurred on street, while 20% occurred on transit. While we applaud the additional efforts being made by the TTC to provide enhanced cleaning at Dundas Station in the proposed budget, and provide 10 outreach workers on streetcar



routes downtown, we do believe a more targeted focus on public transit safety is necessary.

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

- We continue to fund a 7-days a week street operations team to support City efforts in street cleaning and waste management;
- We will continue to invest in the Community Engagement Team as 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 Downtown East leadership and Yonge-Dundas safety network tables;
- We will continue to provide resources for those seeking access to social programs and to those wondering how to report different incidents.

Sincerely,

A large, fluid, handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Pauline Larsen".

Pauline Larsen

Executive Director & COO