

Yonge Street Tragedy Memorial Park Project Plan in Olive Square Park

Date: June 24, 2025

To: Economic and Community Development Committee

From: Interim General Manager, Parks and Recreation

Wards: 18 - Willowdale

SUMMARY

At its meeting on April 24, 2025, City Council directed the General Manager, Parks and Recreation, in consultation with the General Manager, Economic Development and Culture, to develop a plan to redesign Olive Square Park as a permanent memorial to honour and remember the victims of the tragedy that took place on Yonge Street on April 23, 2018.

The report responds to City Council's direction to recommend a plan to redesign Olive Square Park as a permanent memorial through a design competition including further engagement. Engagement with survivors, affected family members with connections to the tragedy, and the Memorial Steering Committee will be carried out beginning in Fall 2025 which will inform a detailed work plan, scope, and design brief for a design competition proposed to launch in April 2026.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Interim General Manager, Parks and Recreation recommends that:

1. Economic and Community Development Committee receive this report for information.

FINANCIAL IMPACT

There is no financial impact resulting from the recommendations in this report.

City Council previously authorized the release of \$118,452 in Section 37 funds to Economic Development and Culture's 2024 Capital Budget for the purpose of initiating a

design competition to develop a permanent memorial to the Yonge Street Tragedy. These funds will be transferred to Parks and Recreation to support initial project development and costs associated with the design competition through the 2025 Q1 Variance Reporting process.

The balance of funding required to complete the memorial and park redevelopment will be considered through the 2026 Capital Budget process. Funding sources may include a combination of City-wide Parkland Dedication Reserve Funds (Section 42) or other eligible reserve sources, subject to confirmation of project eligibility and timing.

The Chief Financial Officer and Treasurer has reviewed this report and agrees with the financial impact information.

DECISION HISTORY

At its meeting on April 17 and 18, 2024, City Council adopted Motion MM17.17 - Authorization to Release Section 37 Funds from Various Developments for a Permanent Memorial to the Yonge Street Tragedy. City Council authorized staff to amend the 2024 Capital Budget for Economic Development and Culture by \$118,452 for the purpose of developing a memorial to honour the lives of those lost in the Yonge Street Tragedy.

<https://secure.toronto.ca/council/agenda-item.do?item=2024.MM17.17>

At its meeting on April 24, 2025, City Council adopted Motion MM29.21 - Charting a Path to a Healing Memorial for the Yonge Street Tragedy. The motion directed the General Manager, Parks and Recreation, in consultation with the General Manager, Economic Development and Culture, to bring forward a plan for a Yonge Street Tragedy memorial in Olive Square Park, and report back to the July 9, 2025 meeting of the Economic and Community Development Committee. The report would include a consultative plan to engage victims' families, the Yonge Street Tragedy Memorial Steering Committee and the Willowdale community; a proposed scope, including current site conditions and elements discussed with the steering committee, including consideration of a water feature, perennial garden and lighting; a design contest timeline; a work plan; funding sources; and a plan that brings forward the earliest possible date of implementation.

<https://secure.toronto.ca/council/agenda-item.do?item=2025.MM29.21>

COMMENTS

Background

In the wake of the tragedy that occurred on Yonge Street on April 23, 2018, which resulted in the loss of eleven lives and injuries to fifteen others, the City of Toronto has

been working collaboratively with survivors, affected family members, and members of the Willowdale community to establish a memorial near the location of the event.

Economic Development and Culture (EDC), working with Strategic Protocol & External Relations (SPER), developed a memorial consultation plan in 2019 based on feedback from those most deeply connected to the tragedy. EDC engaged a consultant with deep connections to the community to lead preliminary discussions on the proposal for a memorial with survivors and family members of the victims, as well as community members of the Willowdale Strong campaign. Consultations began in early 2020 and were paused following the start of the COVID-19 pandemic before resuming in 2021. Drawing on the insights of those affected by the tragedy, the consultant concluded that there was interest in commemorating the event through a physical memorial which would be forward-looking and convey key themes such as love, remembrance, hope for a better future, and community resilience. The consultant also emphasized that planning for a memorial should proceed at a rate that ensures appropriate time and space for healing, recognizing that individuals heal in different ways and at different paces.

Initial efforts were focused on the development of a public artwork, which would serve as a permanent memorial on Yonge Street and be designed by way of a public art competition which was to be initiated by EDC. In April 2024, City Council authorized the release of Section 37 funds to be used toward the creation of a permanent memorial. EDC staff identified a number of prospective sites for a public artwork along Yonge Street. Following discussions with the local Councillor and the project's Memorial Steering Committee to review location options for an art-based memorial, involved stakeholders expressed support for exploring enhancements to Olive Square Park, which would serve as a permanent memorial.

Olive Square Park is an approximately 1,500 square metre park located on Yonge Street, south of Finch Avenue East. The park was identified as suitable for a permanent memorial given its location within the corridor of Yonge Street where the tragedy took place and that it has emerged as a gathering place for individuals from across the City to grieve and express their sympathies through tributes and flowers. Shortly after the incident took place, a plaque was installed within the park to mark the tragedy in advance of a permanent memorial. The plaque remains in place today.

The proposed shift from a public artwork to an enhanced park space would allow for the park to serve as a "living memorial" with opportunities for residents to gather, reflect on, and remember those impacted by the tragedy, and provide a green space to foster community connection. In April 2025, City Council approved a motion directing that a plan be brought forward for a redesign of Olive Square Park, by way of a design competition, to serve as a permanent memorial.

Plan for a Permanent Memorial in Olive Square Park

Parks and Recreation has engaged with the local Councillor, EDC, and SPER to develop a work plan for engagement and a design competition for Olive Square Park as a permanent memorial for the Yonge Street Tragedy. On June 3, 2025, City staff sent a

formal communication to survivors and affected family members to advise of the initiation of a design competition, as supported by Council.

Table 1 provides an overview of the requests through MM29.21 and how these will be addressed through the proposed plan for Olive Square Park.

Table 1: Proposed Plan for a Permanent Memorial in Olive Square Park

<p>Work plan and proposed scope</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fall 2025 onwards: A detailed work plan and scope informed by MM29.21 and a design brief for the design competition will be further developed in collaboration with survivors and family members who have deep connections to the tragedy itself, as well as the Memorial Steering Committee.
<p>Design competition timeline</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fall 2025: Pre-engagement and visioning with survivors, family members, and the members of the Steering Committee (supported by a professional facilitator) to inform and develop the design competition design brief. • Late 2025-early 2026: Retain required third-party professional advisor to oversee the design competition. • April 2026 (proposed): Launch design competition on next anniversary of the Yonge Street Tragedy. • Late 2026: Announcement of shortlisted design teams and development of design competition submissions. • Early 2027: Stakeholder and public review of design competition submissions, formal Jury evaluation, and design award. • Mid-late 2027: Detailed Design. • 2028: Construction start.

<p>Engagement Approach</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Acknowledge the special role this park will play locally, and for people from across Toronto. • Adopt a trauma-informed approach, supported by a third-party with expertise. • Prioritize survivors and families' preferences and build in desired level of involvement in design brief and design evaluation. • Re-engage previously established Steering Committee. • Inform broader community of proposed changes to Olive Square Park to formalize the memorial function of the location.
<p>Funding Sources</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • \$118,452 was originally released in April 2024 from Section 37 funds to Economic Development and Culture's capital budget for the purposes of a public artwork design competition. This amount will be transferred to Parks and Recreation to support project development and initial design competition costs. • The balance of funding will be considered through the 2026 Budget Process and may include a combination of City-wide Section 42 funds or other eligible revenue sources, subject to confirmation of project eligibility and timing.

Next Steps

Parks and Recreation will continue to advance the work plan and will initiate outreach to survivors and affected family members, as well as members of the Memorial Steering Committee, in Fall 2025. In acknowledgement of how Olive Square Park has emerged as a memorial location for the Yonge Street Tragedy, staff will engage the Councillor's office to explore interim park enhancements while the park redesign process is underway.

CONTACT

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SIGNATURE

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