

2024 Distillery Winter Village: Post-Event Review

Date: March 18, 2025

To: Toronto and East York Community Council

From: Director Permits and Enforcement, Transportation Services and Director Traffic Management, Transportation Services

Wards: Ward 10, Spadina-Fort York; Ward 13, Toronto-Centre

SUMMARY

City Council directed Transportation Services, in collaboration with Economic Development and Culture and Municipal Licensing and Standards divisions, to review the Distillery Winter Village immediately following the event and report back to Toronto and East York Community Council on a variety of issues including traffic and parking impacts, noise, and calls to 311. This report responds to this directive and provides a summary of the assessment undertaken by Transportation Services and partner Divisions.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Director, Permits and Enforcement, Transportation Services and the Director, Traffic Management, Transportation Services recommend that:

1. Toronto and East York Community Council receive this report for information.

FINANCIAL IMPACT

There are no financial impacts resulting from the adoption of the recommendation in this report.

DECISION HISTORY

On November 13, 2024 City Council adopted Item TE17.32 and in so doing, directed Transportation Services to review the Distillery Winter Village and report back on a number of impacts including traffic, parking, and noise: Agenda Item History - 2024.TE17.32

On October 24, 2024, Toronto and East York Community Council adopted Item TE17.31 which authorized temporary parking and traffic changes on streets within the Distillery District for the duration of the 2024 Distillery Winter Village event: Agenda Item History - 2024.TE17.31

COMMENTS

The Distillery Winter Village is a winter festival that has been held annually in the Distillery District since 2010, except for 2020 due to COVID-19 related lockdowns. The event is held entirely within private property in the Distillery District and therefore the permit issued by Transportation Services on the public right-of-way is to support the community to assist with traffic mitigation.

Over the years, the event has increasingly attracted hundreds of thousands of visitors each year to the Distillery District. For the 2024-2025 season, the event took place from November 13, 2024 to January 5, 2025 inclusive. In 2019, due to the high volume of visitors, the event organizer hired BA Consulting Group to design and implement a traffic management plan (TMP) to manage the high volume of vehicular and pedestrian traffic during the event, minimize impacts on local residents, and address safety concerns. A variation of the traffic plan has been implemented annually through the Street Event permit.

Similar to previous years, the 2024 TMP included temporarily restricting vehicular access during peak event periods on portions of Mill Street and Trinity Street with access controlled by paid duty officers, designating various pick-up/drop-off areas, designating Front Street East as one-way eastbound between Trinity Street and Cherry Street, removing paid parking and permit parking spaces on Mill Street, Trinity Street and Front Street East, among other temporary changes.

Beyond the event's TMP, Transportation Services also temporarily amends permit parking hours on surrounding residential streets to 24 hours to ensure that parking spaces on these streets are available for local residents for the duration of the event.

In response to the direction from City Council, Transportation Services and partner Divisions have reviewed various aspects of the 2024 Distillery Winter Village event. The following sections of this report provide a summary of the assessments undertaken.

a. an assessment of the operations of the 2024 Distillery Winter Village, including insights around traffic impacts, accessibility, noise, parking, and calls to 311

Traffic Impacts

As the event attracts an increasingly large number of visitors to the area, the implementation of the TMP is intended to help reduce the amount of traffic affecting portions of Mill Street and Trinity Street during the peak hours of the event.

One of the major concerns identified by the area residents is the length of the event and continuous traffic impacts, which affects the residents and their daily lives. The

significant increase in vehicular traffic creates challenges for residents who have expressed frustration with increased travel times over the years. Residents of the Distillery District have specifically identified concerns with evening rush-hour commute times.

Some of these concerns have been addressed by the event organizers' TMP, with residents reporting an improvement in travel times and traffic on Mill Street. However, other issues, like illegal parking blocking the temporary extended left turn lane on Mill Street and emergency road closures, such as collision investigations, could exacerbate problems around the Distillery. To mitigate traffic congestion in the area, Transportation Services restricted construction activity around the Distillery District for the duration of the event.

To assist with traffic movement during the event, Transportation Services made traffic signal timing adjustments to traffic signals in the area and monitored available traffic cameras to identify any traffic congestion issues.

Notwithstanding any traffic congestion resulting from the event, Emergency Services advised they have not experienced any delays and there have been no reports of delays to emergency crews responding to the Distillery District and surrounding neighbourhoods.

The Distillery District encourages visitors to use various forms of travel including public transit, ride-share, and Bike Share Toronto. Public transit options include the King Streetcar Line to Parliament St, which is a 5-minute walk from the Distillery District's west entrance. From Castle Frank Station, visitors can take the 65-bus south to one block south of Front Street.

Accessibility

The Distillery Winter Village is held annually at the Distillery District, which is a commercial and residential district in the east end of the downtown area of the city. As the event is held within an already pedestrianized and heavily trafficked area, there are numerous accessible entrance locations around the property. The event organizer advised that entrances to the property are AODA compliant and are lit during the operations of the event. The event organizer actively responds to accessibility concerns and works closely with the property managers to ensure residents, businesses and visitors have their access requirements met.

There are concerns with extensive pedestrian queues outside of the event entrances along Cherry Street and Parliament Street, which can make it difficult for residents to get in and out of their residential buildings. The Distillery District works closely with the resident associations to manage these concerns.

Noise

MLS reported some residents raised concerns regarding the length of time, frequency, and intensity of the music during the event period. The event organizer has worked with residents and businesses to find solutions for all parties to mitigate these impacts.

The event organizer received a noise exemption permit from the Municipal Licensing and Standards Division for the duration of the event. MLS dispatched officers on alternating Fridays and Saturdays during the permitted times to take sound level measurements at various points inside the market and at the property lines. During all visits, the event was complying with the conditions of its Noise Exemption Permit.

Parking

Due to the high percentage of visitors that choose to drive to the event, parking availability is limited. The event organizer designated overflow parking at Toronto Parking Authority (TPA) Carpark 43, 200 Queens Quay Carpark and 350 Lake Shore Blvd Carpark, which are identified on the Distillery Winter Village website.

On-street permit parking hours are extended temporarily to 24 hours, to improve parking flexibility throughout the Winter Village for residents with permit parking passes. This enables the Parking Enforcement unit to effectively control parking by non-residents through tagging and towing operations.

Due to the implementation of the parking restrictions on Mill Street, Trinity Street, and Parliament Street, the event organizer provides the residents within the 6N permit parking area alternative visitor parking passes in the 33 Mill Street Parking Lot P1. The event organizer provided residents temporary visitor parking at 390 Cherry Street underground parking for personal support workers, and visitors.

Illegal parking on Mill Street, in the temporarily extended left turn lane on the south side, as well as the temporary parking on the north side, continue to raise concerns. As the bike lane separates the on-street parking from the signage placed on the boulevard, the visibility of the no-parking signs may be reduced. The City will continue to review the parking signage and explore opportunities to improve visibility.

Parking concerns have also been raised by the residents in the area just west of the Distillery District during the event, specifically in the 6K permit parking area. Residents have identified the temporary removal of the 1-hour street has led to an increased cost for the residents as they are now required to obtain temporary parking permits for all of their visitors.

Transportation Services staff continue conversations with the resident's associations and the on-street permit parking office to assist with finding solutions to help address their concerns.

Calls to 311

311 Toronto provides access for residents, visitors, and businesses to submit and track a service request, find information about non-emergency City services and programs, as well as search for service requests in their neighbourhoods with easy access to information 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

Leading up to and during the 2024 Winter Village event, 311 received eight email concerns from local residents regarding the event that were rerouted to the Street

Events unit in Transportation Services for documentation purposes for this report. Concerns include traffic congestion, illegal parking, accessibility, and noise complaints.

From the eight complaints received between October 4, 2024 and December 17, 2024, 6 complaints were addressed and resolved by the Distillery District team. One of those concerns included many items that were long-term problems, mostly unrelated to the Distillery Districts' TMP and ultimately out of scope for the Distillery District Winter Village team to address. Two of the complaints received were focused on parking issues that could not be addressed by the Distillery District team in 2024. One of these complaints was forwarded to the Toronto Police Parking Enforcement Unit for consideration and the other complaint is being reviewed by Transportation Services as noted above.

b. considerations around the extended duration of the Winter Village over the history of the event

Table 1: Distillery District Winter Village Event Dates from 2017 to 2024

Year	Dates	Total Calendar Days	Notes
2017	November 16 to December 23	38	Closed on Monday
2018	November 15 to December 23	39	Closed on Monday
2019	November 14 to December 22	39	Closed on Monday
2020	Closed due to COVID-19	N/A	N/A
2021	November 18 to December 31	44	Closed on Monday
2022	November 17 to December 31	45	Closed on Monday
2023	November 16 to January 7	53	Open 7 days/week
2024	November 13 to January 5	54	Open 7 days/week

As shown in Table 1, prior to the pandemic, the event's average length was approximately under 40 days, which also includes Mondays, when the Winter Market was closed. Post 2020, the event length grew to over 44 days, and again in 2023 to 53 days.

It has been reported that a reduction in attendees to the Distillery District takes place after Christmas Day, and therefore the traffic congestion in the area is reduced.

The event organizer is responsible for implementing the TMP. This includes managing all signage, traffic control personnel, and equipment in accordance with the TMP. Over the years, the extended duration of the event has had some impact on the city's traffic

mitigation efforts. However, the increased duration has had minimal effect on signal timing adjustments made by the city. Once the signal timings are established, they are entered into the City's traffic system and remain unchanged for the duration of the event, unless any issues arise that necessitate adjustments. The length of the event does affect the staff resources needed to monitor traffic conditions on the City's roadways using traffic monitoring cameras. The longer the event lasts, the more staff resources are required for effective monitoring.

c. considerations around existing and future planned and projected local traffic impacts, including City works, private development and Metrolinx construction of Corktown Station

Transportation Services reviews and circulates the consultant's proposed TMP to ensure no conflicts with construction projects or other major events. The circulation of the proposal is sent to various sections, departments, divisions, and outside agencies of the City, including Traffic Operations, Toronto Police Services, Toronto Fire, Paramedic Services, the Toronto Transit Commission (TTC), Ward Councillors, Toronto Parking Authority, MLS, Metrolinx GO, and others for their comments, recommendations, and concerns. The review process of the proposal includes the various construction coordination planning and implementation teams which review the road occupation request for conflicts with planned roadwork, private developments, and major infrastructure projects to determine the feasibility of the request.

City staff have identified a number of upcoming City works and private construction projects that may impact the traffic consultant's TMP in future years:

- The continuation of the closure of the northbound curb lane on Parliament Street between Lake Shore Boulevard and Mill Street to facilitate construction of the developments located at 31 and 33 Parliament Street
- Private development at 55 Eastern Avenue will result in the temporary closure of the westbound curb lane at the corner of Front Street East and Cherry Street and a temporary closure of the southbound cycle lane and west sidewalk on Cherry Street between Front Street and Eastern Avenue starting in Spring 2025 to 2027
- Quayside infrastructure and public realm project will have phased closures at the intersection of Lake Shore Boulevard and Parliament Street (timeline is to be determined)
- Distillery District is located within Metrolinx Ontario Line Review Zone which means Metrolinx will review all applications within this zone and provide comments to the City of potential conflicts with the transit project construction

In the case of the Distillery Winter Village, the event does not take place on the City's public right-of-way, as opposed to Street Festivals. Therefore, event feasibility is not determined by Transportation Services. Transportation Services' role is to support traffic management during the event times by coordinating with the various construction activities in the surrounding area and determine the feasibility of implementing the traffic management plan, the temporary traffic regulation changes, and any cost recovery required by the city for these changes and services offered.

d. identifying options for supporting the Distillery District's activation and local small businesses initiatives year-round; and

The Economic Development and Culture Division of the City of Toronto provides financial assistance, online training, and other resources in partnership with government and private sector partners to support small businesses in Toronto. There are several supports available for businesses in the Distillery District, through the [Visitor Economy Office](#), where businesses can seek assistance to promote events and attractions, as well as guidance on best practices on activations.

Supports include:

- [Festivals & Events Calendar](#); and
- Promotion at [Toronto Tourist Information Centre](#).

Additional supports available for small business:

- One-on-one consultation to get personalized, professional advice on how to meet business challenges and maximize opportunities through the [Toronto Small Business Enterprise Centre](#);
- Various City [funding opportunities](#) for businesses; and
- [Business webinars](#) on a range of topics.

Businesses are encouraged to subscribe to the [BusinessTO newsletter](#) to receive the latest information on supports available.

e. a set of recommendations on operations of the Winter Village in future years, including around optimal duration of the event.

As the Distillery Winter Village takes place entirely on private property, Transportation Services has no jurisdiction to issue a permit for the event or the occupation of the private roads within the Distillery District. The Street Events Unit within Transportation Services evaluates street event applications and reviews applicants' traffic management plans. In the case of the Distillery Winter Village event, staff issued a permit to facilitate implementation of the TMP developed by the event organizers' consultant to address concerns raised by the community. The TMP includes temporary traffic and parking regulations to help maintain efficient traffic flow in and around the Distillery District, minimize impacts on local residents, and most importantly address safety concerns.

Recently, Transportation Services participated in an onsite meeting with the Distillery District, Gooderham & Worts Neighbourhood Association (GWNA), City Staff, Toronto Police Parking Enforcement, the local Councillors Office, and the BA Group (Traffic Management Consultant), to discuss ways to alleviate the concerns raised by residents.

In response to City Council's direction ([TE17.32](#)), Transportation Services staff engaged in multiple stakeholder meetings with the Gooderham & Worts Neighbourhood Association (GWNA), and Longboat Area Resident's Association (LARA) to discuss the traffic impacts on the local residents from the Winter Village.

The City will make the following recommendations for the event organizer to consider implementing for the 2025 event, based on staff observations and feedback received from various stakeholders:

- Continue engagement between event organizer, city stakeholders, and the local community throughout the year to ensure proper documentation is submitted in a timely manner by the event organizer;
- Establish a recurring working group meeting with all stakeholders;
- Increase the number of police on site to support vehicle/pedestrian flow;
- Simplify signage for drivers and pedestrians navigating the neighbourhood;
- Plan for the opening of the street north of Mill Street, between Trinity Street and Cherry Street, and how the street access will further impact traffic flow;
- Improve coordination around Bikeshare availability during the event;
- Improve the control of visitor entry for the entire duration of the event, rather than just evening and weekend times to manage volumes of attendees;
- Find alternative queuing location solutions for the Cherry and Parliament Winter Village entrances to minimize pedestrian congestion blocking residents' access at both sites;
- Continue to work with ride-share companies to improve pickup/drop-off operations; and
- Continue to work with the Parking Enforcement unit to investigate solutions for more proactive enforcement.

The City will continue to support traffic mitigation efforts during future iterations of the Distillery Winter Village by reviewing the traffic consultant's TMP, making temporary traffic signal adjustments, monitoring available traffic cameras to identify and respond to traffic congestion issues, liaising with the TTC to identify temporary transit priority measures, coordinating road works in the surrounding area, and participating in stakeholder engagement meetings.

CONTACT

Marco Savino, Manager, Permits and Enforcement, Transportation Services, 416-394-8422, Marco.Savino@toronto.ca

Linda Lee, Manager Traffic Event Management Planning, Transportation Services, 416-397-0506, linda.lee@toronto.ca

SIGNATURE

Antonia Markos
Director, Permits and Enforcement, Transportation Services

Roger Browne, M.A.Sc., P. Eng.
Director, Traffic Management, Transportation Services