



GOODERHAM & WORTS

NEIGHBOURHOOD ASSOCIATION

April 30, 2025

Toronto and East York Community Council

Toronto City Hall

100 Queen Street West

Toronto, ON M5H 2N2

Via email to: teycc@toronto.ca

Subject: Comments for 2025.TE22.19

2024 Distillery Winter Village: Post-Event Review

Dear Members of Toronto and East York Community Council,

I am writing today on behalf of the Gooderham & Worts Neighborhood Association (GWNA). For more than two decades, GWNA has worked to serve the interests and enhance the quality of life for residents in and around the Distillery District. GWNA volunteers have collaborated with the Distillery District's management for many years through an ongoing Distillery Roundtable.

As residents of the Distillery District, we appreciate your support in having Transportation Services Staff, in collaboration with Economic Development and Culture, and Municipal Licensing and Standards, review the 2024 Distillery Winter Village (DWV) event and provide recommendations for future years.

The GWNA recognizes the importance of the DWV to the Distillery District's commercial property owners and business tenants, and the efforts the Distillery has made to address resident concerns. That said, GWNA implores the Distillery to find ways to shorten the length and intensity of the event so that negative impacts on residents are reduced. As noted in the staff report, the duration of DWV has extended by more than 40%, and the prior respite of one day a week closures has been eliminated. The now effectively two months long occupation of the neighbourhood without a break takes a toll on residents.

We strongly support the report's recommendations. We would like to share additional thoughts on a few of them.

Parking Enforcement remains a significant challenge and Distillery management has conveyed that it is out of their hands. Mindful of increasing the financial burden on the city to provide more enforcement resources, we wonder whether there might be an approach, analogous to Paid Duty Officers, for the event organizer to cover the cost of the additional parking enforcement that is sorely needed to respond to the many problem drivers drawn into the area by the event.

Paid advance ticketing introduced by the event organizer helps manage visitor volumes during the anticipated peak times some weeknights and weekends. However, it has the perverse effect of inducing larger crowds ahead of the paid start times, before event staff and Paid Duty Officers are present to



GOODERHAM & WORTS NEIGHBOURHOOD ASSOCIATION

effectively manage the volumes. We would very much like to see advance ticketing with timed entry windows throughout the event, for both paid and free admission, to enable intentional control over the number of visitors.

Queues of visitors stretching around the block waiting to get into the Winter Village impede residents getting to and from their homes and raise safety concerns when residents are forced off sidewalks into the streets. Staff's recommendation to find alternative queuing solutions is key for resident safety.

Attached for your reference is the written post-event feedback provided by GWNA to Transportation Services Staff in February of this year. This reflects polling feedback from residents on the event and includes some quotes from residents that help convey tone.

The Distillery Winter Village is a major event for the City of Toronto and beloved by many, including many residents within the neighbourhood. However, additional measures and more consistent execution by organizers and their contractors are needed to make it a more consistently positive experience for visitors and residents alike. We would greatly appreciate your support in motivating Distillery District management to adopt all the recommendations in the staff report.

Sincerely,

Neil Betteridge
President
Gooderham & Worts Neighborhood Association
president@gwna.ca

CC:

Deputy Mayor Malik, Vienna O'Shea, Saarah Khan, Chris Haskim - Ward 10
Councillor Moise, Macy Parakh, Edward LaRusic - Ward 13

GWNA post-event position on the Distillery Winter Village 2024 February 2025

Summary

The GWNA recognizes the importance of the DWV to the Distillery and the businesses within it, and the efforts the Distillery has made to address resident concerns, but asks the Distillery to find ways to shorten the length and intensity of the event so that impacts on residents are minimized.

Background

The annual Distillery Winter Village was held November 13, 2024 to January 5, 2025 in the Distillery District in downtown Toronto. The event has a huge impact on residents each year, with increased congestion, foot traffic, parking restrictions, interruptions to deliveries, taxi pickup and drop off, trades and support workers, as well as increased noise and other disruptions around the neighbourhood.

The Distillery has worked closely with the GWNA, on behalf of the residents of the area, over the last few years to mitigate many of these issues.

In the summer of 2024 the GWNA presented the Distillery with a summary of issues and suggestions gathered from the community from the 2023 event. This followed Distillery representatives' attendance at a community feedback meeting held in January 2024. The Distillery worked over the course of several months to respond to this feedback and attempt to address many issues. Issues addressed included developing a new parking system for trades/guests/personal support workers, improving signage, making the area outside the DWV more visually appealing, changing music playlists, reviewing the system by which passes are allocated and altering the system for Uber pickup and drop off. The GWNA recognizes and appreciates the amount of work that the Distillery put into addressing these issues.

The number one issue for residents, however, was the length of the Distillery Winter Village and the decision to further extend the length of the DWV in 2024, following the extension in 2023, was something the GWNA could not support. The GWNA made this clear to the Distillery and the Distillery made clear that they felt this extended length was necessary to support their businesses.

2024 event summary

The 2024 event was successful and attracted more people to the area than previous years. This meant additional challenges in managing the flow of people and vehicular traffic.

The GWNA gathered feedback from the community via the GWNA Facebook page, and the following issues were most prevalent:

- The timing of the event was too long and the fact that the event ran seven days a week for nearly two months gave residents no reprieve.
- Parking enforcement was almost nonexistent and Distillery Winter Village visitors were parked illegally, including in areas designated for other uses (such as the extended left turn lane on Mill Street).
- Paid duty officers were not initially scheduled for all busy times (this was rectified) and were inconsistent in their application of the rules, leading to a lot of frustration for residents.
- Traffic congestion was higher than the previous year, due in part to higher attendance and to Ubers and buses dropping passengers off and blocking all traffic.
- There was a lot of pedestrian congestion, especially around entrances to the Distillery Winter Village at Cherry and Parliament Streets, that made it difficult for residents to get in and out of the neighbourhood, and in and out of their residential buildings.
- Winter Village patrons repeatedly took over residential building entry foyers as waiting areas, ignoring private residence signage, and resisting requests to leave so residents could safely access their homes.
- Residents and visitors were confused about the passenger drop off area - it was not well marked and not an inviting place to be dropped off, as it was a construction site. The result was that this area was underused and caused congestion elsewhere.
- There were also numerous disruptions throughout the neighbourhood for residents, including cars parked illegally in laneways or garages, noise, public urination and garbage on the streets, sidewalks and alleys.
- Residents found Bikeshare unreliable during this time as there seemed to be no adjustments made to account for the change in usage patterns, resulting in stations being either completely empty or full when needed.

The GWNA was also happy to see the following improvements this year, which were the result of efforts from the Distillery to address resident concerns:

- Passes worked more smoothly than in previous years.
- Access for personal support workers, trades and visitors improved significantly from last year.
- Uber pick up and drop off still needs to be improved, but it felt like allowing access solved a lot of issues for residents using ride hail and delivery services, even if it did add to congestion (see above) creating other issues for residents.
- Paid duty officers improved over the course of the DWV, as they became more familiar with their duties.
- Traffic congestion was still better than years where there was no traffic management plan (pre-pandemic).
- Music was more varied for residents so they were not listening to the same songs for two months.

- Communication was improved with proactive messaging sent out to all residents, as well as an update made during the DWV. The Distillery responded to many resident concerns in near real time.

The GWNA, on behalf of all residents, asks the Distillery to considering the following in planning for next year's event:

- Continue to engage with the community throughout the year as many of the improvements this year came from resident feedback
- Shorten the event for 2025 to the month of December, and consider closing again on Mondays.
- Ensure the City has enough time to thoroughly review the traffic management plan in advance of the DWV, and has time for feedback, corrections and to do walkthrough of site signage before the event. This is to ensure problems are addressed in advance of the event rather than during.
- Continue shift started in 2024 of dispersing events throughout the year so that tenants are not so reliant on the months of November and December to survive
- Plan well in advance for the opening of the street behind 70/80 Mill, and for the construction on Blocks 3,4 and 7 to be complete, as well as new traffic impacts from other City and private projects starting in 2025.
- The time windows before paid ticketing starts often seems to be the busiest (as people are trying to get in later in the day but before they have to pay), and staffing should reflect that reality.
- Consider requiring advance tickets at all times, even if free, to have a means of managing volumes of attendees.
- Continue evaluating ways in which more Uber pickup/dropoff can be improved, including whether there are ways to prevent Uber dropoffs at congested locations
- Engage with parking enforcement early, investigate solutions for more proactive towing
- Continue to improve signage, have consultants ensure signage is correct in advance of the DWV start date.
- Consider strategies to ensure fewer problems from the beginning of the event, as generally many of the same problems arise early on and are solved by the end of the DWV each year. This could include strategies to ensure the learning curve for paid duty officers is not so steep.
- Share any data possible with GWNA to help us work as partners in planning
- Move the bus stop on Mill Street just east of Parliament from Mill to Parliament on the north side of Mill.
- Find alternative queuing location solutions for the Cherry and Parliament Winter Village entrances to minimize pedestrian congestion blocking residents' access at both sites and issues with passenger drop offs in the bike lane on Cherry.

In addition, we ask the City to:

- Make decisions on behalf of residents that can make the neighbourhood livable during the DWV.

- Require the Distillery to submit the traffic management plan well in advance so there is time for review and to proactively fix problems.
- Step up efforts on traffic management around the DWV, extending beyond the current traffic management plan. Consider how the traffic management plan fits into the larger fabric of the city. Traffic management can't be done by residents and the Distillery alone.

Quotes from residents

"This year has been a disaster. Parking rules are being completely ignored, with cars constantly stopping to question the guards at the entrance, causing unnecessary traffic and delays for accessing the buildings. Even residents with valid permits were denied entry by the guards." - Abraham

"For the most part I felt this was slightly better but it was too long. Way too long." - Sophie

"The length of time is ridiculous." - Dee

"Overall I felt there was some improvement but not enough." - Lisa

"It was somewhat better, mainly due to local roads like Cherry not being shut down for long term construction. There seemed to be somewhat more consistent police presence enforcing entry to Trinity and Mill Streets. I did not experience complete gridlock of the entire neighbourhood as I have in past years." - Tim

"Pedestrian management/crowd control seemed significantly worse - I felt like we basically lost access to the sidewalk on parliament street. It is absolutely too long." - Luke

"Something needs to be done to move cars and pedestrians along at the Mill St gates. Whether it's officers to signal when pedestrians can and can't walk (the flow is constant and they just cross in waves or jaywalk through the intersection) and also to force taxis and ride shares to NOT pickup and drop off literally in the middle of the intersection!!!" - Susanna

"Why must [the Distillery] wait each year until they get repeated reports of problems?" - Margaret

Conclusion

The GWNA advocates for a shorter, less intense DWV next year. We have seen major improvements to the DWV over the past few years and hope that through continued coordination between The Distillery, the GWNA and the City we can further improve the event and make the holiday season more enjoyable for residents next year.