

February 23, 2026

Economic and Community Development Committee  
Chair, Alejandra Bravo and Members of the committee

**Re: Item EC26.3**

On behalf of TABIA and our member BIAs, we strongly support the adoption of Toronto's Festival Strategy. Festivals are not peripheral to our local economies they are catalytic. The Strategy correctly recognizes that Toronto's nearly 300 festivals are a critical cultural and economic force. From a main street perspective, festivals animate commercial corridors, drive foot traffic, extend dwell time, and increase local spending. They turn neighbourhoods into destinations. They create moments of discovery that convert visitors into repeat customers.

For BIAs, festivals are among the most effective place-making and economic development tools available. They reinforce neighbourhood branding, support small and independent businesses, and generate multiplier effects across retail, hospitality, and service sectors. We know that when a street is animated, businesses benefit and so do residents. Streets feel safer, more welcoming, and more connected.

The Strategy's four priority areas Sector Development; Sector Sustainability and Resilience; Improving Processes; and Awareness and Impact — align directly with what our BIAs and festival partners have been calling for.

First, on sustainability and resilience: rising production costs, security requirements, insurance, and staffing pressures have created strain across the sector. The continuation and formalization of the Special Events Stabilization Initiative is essential. Without financial stability, we risk losing events that are foundational to neighbourhood economies. In fact, we've already seen some festivals pause or cancel because of costs, like the Taste of the Danforth, which we are pleased to see return once again this year.

Second, on improving processes: the commitment to a centralized digital permitting solution and streamlined processes is critical. BIAs and festival organizers navigate fragmented systems across multiple divisions. Reducing administrative friction is economic enablement. When processes are clear, predictable, and coordinated, more organizations can participate and grow their events.

Third, the Strategy's emphasis on impact measurement and data collection is particularly important. BIAs rely on credible data to attract sponsors, partners, and investment. A robust monitoring and evaluation framework strengthens advocacy and supports long-term funding sustainability.

Finally, the creation of the Toronto Festival Association is a transformative step. A unified body will provide coordinated sector representation, resource pooling, marketing alignment, and structured dialogue with the City and other levels of government.

From TABIA's lens, this is about connecting festivals, main streets, tourism, and economic development into one cohesive ecosystem. The cascading benefits are clear: economically, festivals stimulate local spending, support employment, and contribute to Toronto's global competitiveness. Socially, they strengthen belonging, celebrate diversity, and reduce isolation. The survey data cited in the report underscores that festivals are among the most important ways residents experience culture, diversity and community.

When we invest in festivals, we are investing in neighbourhood vitality, small business resilience, and civic wellbeing.

TABIA is proud to stand as a founding partner in the Toronto Festival Network. We believe this Strategy provides the framework to stabilize, modernize, and grow the sector in a way that benefits every ward and every community.

We respectfully urge Committee to adopt the Toronto Festival Strategy and advance this important work for Toronto's main streets and neighbourhoods.

Regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'John Kiru', written in a cursive style.

John Kiru

CEO, Toronto Association of Business Improvement Areas (TABIA)