

NOTICE OF MOTION

Implementing the Cultural Districts Program

Moved by: Councillor

Moise

Seconded by: Councillor

Matlow

SUMMARY:

City Council has provided clear and consistent direction on the establishment of a Cultural Districts Program since 2020. In January of that year, Council directed the General Manager, Economic Development and Culture to develop recommendations to support the retention of LGBTQ2S+ small businesses and cultural spaces, with particular attention to the Church-Wellesley Village (2020.MM14.8). In September 2020, Council directed the development of a Cultural District Plan for the Little Jamaica neighbourhood along Eglinton Avenue West, including formal designation, community engagement, and a retail and heritage strategy (2020.MM24.36). In November 2021, Council directed staff to undertake broad public engagement and return with a final Cultural Districts Program design and implementation plan by the third quarter of 2022 — a deadline that has since passed without a program being brought forward (2021.EC25.3).

In the years that followed, extensive community consultations were conducted by urban planner and public engagement specialist Jay Pitter, generating meaningful input from residents, business owners, and community organizations across Little Jamaica, the Church-Wellesley Village, and Chinatown. That work has been completed. It is my understanding, based on conversations with City staff, that the program design work was sufficiently advanced to be included in the December 2025 Council cycle. For reasons that have not been adequately explained, the report was deferred to 2027 - a delay that is simply unacceptable given the urgency of this work and the communities that have been waiting.

Cultural District designation is not solely a matter of grants or financial support. It is first and foremost an act of recognition - an acknowledgement of the cultural significance that Little Jamaica, the Church-Wellesley Village, and Chinatown hold for the City of Toronto and its residents. If fiscal constraints are contributing to the delay, the appropriate first step is to formally recognize these communities within existing resources, and to build upon the program as additional resources are made available through the annual budget process.

Reason for Urgency:

This motion is urgent as Council direction on this approach to implement Cultural District is necessary to ensure staff have time to submit the necessary reports and bills for June 2026.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. City Council direct the General Manager, Economic Development and Culture, in collaboration with the Chief Planner and Executive Director, City Planning, and the Executive Director, Development Review, to bring forward the final program design and implementation plan for the Cultural District Program.
2. City Council direct the General Manager, Economic Development and Culture, in collaboration with the Chief Planner and Executive Director, City Planning, and the Executive Director, Development Review, to report to the June 9, 2026 Economic & Community Development Committee meeting with the necessary recommendations and bills to formally recognize and designate the Little Jamaica Cultural District, the Church-Wellesley Village Cultural District, and the Chinatown Cultural District.
3. City Council direct the General Manager, Economic Development and Culture, the Chief Planner and Executive Director, City Planning, and the Executive Director, Development Review, to report to the June 11, 2026 Planning and Housing Committee meeting with necessary recommendations to initiate Community Improvement Plans in Little Jamaica, Church-Wellesley Village, and Chinatown.
4. City Council direct the General Manager, Economic Development and Culture, in consultation with the Chief Planner, City Planning and Executive Director, Development Review and community partners, to report through the 2027 budget process on any elements of the Cultural Districts Program that require financial resources, either as base budget requests or as new and enhanced budget requests that allow City Council to make an informed decision on implementing those elements of the program.