

Motion Without Notice

Improving communication for planned cinematic “shock and awe” explosion and fireball effects in movie production near local neighbourhoods: Lessons learned from Downsview.

Moved by: Councillor Pasternak



Seconded by: Councillor Perruzza

SUMMARY:

On the evening of April 16, 2026, a movie production company was working on a music video on federal lands commonly referred to as the Festival Terrace. The Project Title was Project Bot Factory. Advance notice described the main scene as a “one time flash from 8 motars/13 drums as well as falling (movie) snow.” This was to be contained in a 100 ft by 100 ft zone, and with a 200 ft safety perimeter around the SPFX zone.” Posters were affixed at various locations in Downsview Park and there was a direct to home and businesses flyer distribution. This proved to be inadequate.

At approximately 10:40 pm a controlled explosion occurred creating a large fire ball, mushroom cloud, loud explosive noise and vibrations that was seen and heard through out the Ancaster-Downsview neighbourhoods. Many residents were not aware of the film shoot and were shocked when the explosion took place. The local Councillor received dozens of e-mails, calls and online notifications from people worried that a major industrial accident or plane crash occurred. This was the same neighbourhood that was impacted by the Sunrise Propane Explosion in 2008. The landowner, Canada Lands Company, was also inundated with inquiries and has since issued an apology.

While the movie industry is a cherished part of Toronto’s economy and culture, there must be a review of notification protocols when major controlled explosions are planned. Residents were deeply disturbed and frightened by these events, and it is incumbent on the City of Toronto to have an urgent review of its community/neighbourhood notification protocols when a movie production includes explosive devices and other special effects. This motion is urgent as we are going into an outdoor filming season, and our residents need to know that this stressful situation will not happen again.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

City Council direct the General Manager, Economic Development and Culture, in consultation with Fire Chief and General Manager, Toronto Fire Services and Explosive Disposal Unit, to review the process by which surrounding residential and commercial notification requirements related to City-permitted pyrotechnic events are determined and applied, and report back to the Economic and Community Development Committee with proposed process improvements by end Q2 2026, with such a review to consider a standardized notification protocol with a longer notification period, wider catchment area and expanded media platforms for a clearly-defined category of high impact activities which may be reasonably expected to have significant have community impacts.