

Geary Works
Notes from Stakeholder Meeting # 1 – Group Discussion
December 4, 2019

Summary of Stakeholder Comments

The following summaries of the group discussion with local stakeholders are based on the individual responses that have been recorded and categorized below.

1. Why did you choose to locate your business or cultural enterprise on Geary Ave?

The exciting mix of small scale industrial and commercial uses in combination with a sense of a creative entrepreneurial community was cited as the number one reason businesses and creative enterprises opted to locate on Geary Avenue. The raw, open concept spaces with high ceilings that offer a gritty authenticity was another huge draw for businesses, offering flexible space for small scale manufacturing, food production, and commercial uses. The context of Geary Avenue being located reasonably close to the Downtown with convenient local amenities also drew businesses to Geary Avenue, especially considering the general short supply of industrial space near the Downtown. Reasonably affordable rents are another significant benefit.

Mix of uses / Geary community

- Geary is "mixed" and it should stay this way
- They mentioned the Green Line as a strong potential green space for the neighbourhood
- That Geary Ave was an employment area was good
- Want to maintain culture of Geary
- There's a synergy of people and work on Geary – creators, makers, manufacturers
- Wanted to find property owners with a shared vision
- Mix of production and consumption
- Hub of manufacturing and creativity – "maker street"
- Hub of food production
- Up-and-coming area
- Fell in love with the area because of the proximity to music culture
- Fantastic energy, like Queen West used to be
- Wanted to build a music hub

- Liked the mix of uses – exciting mix of uses
- There is a sense of community
- They also mentioned that they see themselves part of the whole neighbourhood rather than the specific Geary community
- All mentioned that there are no issues with the different entities and usages. All neighbours are living together, garages, artists and other businesses

Good industrial/commercial/event spaces

- Saw potential in the street and the building
- Built form nature of the building – high ceilings, flexible space, well built
- Looking for manufacturing space, mixed-use space
- Terrific lighting
- Large floorplate and high ceilings
- Raw open space for creative arts – art studio, photography
- Like the grittiness and raw aesthetic – a beautiful character
- Exciting gritty space – good fit for production / media
- Needed a space for loud drumming – space to make lots of noise
- Needed a space for music rehearsal, music production, film studio and event venue
- Authentic

Convenient location / good location for customers

- Closest industrial space to Downtown.
- Geary Ave is one of the last places to find industrial space
- Close to downtown
- Close to home
- Galleria redevelopment will increase activity
- Close to subway
- Close to home
- For grocery shopping they go to the Galleria, the Sobeys and the Fietsa Farm on Christie

Affordable

- They came here for the large affordable spaces. But it is not affordable anymore
- Looking for stability and affordable rent prices
- Originally cheap rent
- Affordable

2. What were the biggest challenges you faced when opening your business?

The biggest challenge facing businesses and cultural enterprises is the existing zoning that restricts several non-residential uses that would be beneficial to their operations. Specifically, there is a high demand to allow restaurants and event venues, which are not permitted by the zoning by-law. Office uses are also a desired use that are not permitted on some properties on Geary Avenue. The Minor Variance or rezoning processes to

propose such uses are costly and time-consuming with uncertain outcomes. Some stakeholders would also like live-work units to be a permitted use.

Another major challenge facing businesses is insufficient space in the existing buildings for the expansion of successful existing uses or the introduction of new small scale industrial uses. Many businesses find Geary Avenue to be an undesirable place for customers to visit considering traffic hazards, a shortage parking, poor lighting at night, and a general impression that Geary Avenue is a rough area with a relatively low volume of pedestrian activity.

Uses not permitted by zoning

- The existing zoning doesn't anticipate the smaller scale industrial/commercial/retail uses that are opening on Geary Ave
- Need to jump through hoops for approval
- Minor Variances needed for preferred uses
- Difficult to get permission for a patio
- Too much time and money to change the zoning
- The tattoo shop needs variances
- New at leasing space
- Uncertainty created by regulations
- Zoning challenges – restaurants not permitted
- Needed minor variance for a restaurant use
- Still challenges with parking and outdoor seating for patios
- Should be relaxing zoning rules in terms of the percentages allowed for retail and restaurant uses – 20% is too low
- Permits and licensing
- No food sales that supports business
- Illegal rave parties
- Zoning – event venue not a permitted use (Geary Lane)
- Restaurant and ticketed event venue not permitted (226 Geary)
- Office use not permitted (NE corner of Dovercourt and Geary)
- Rehearsal space permitted but an audience is not permitted
- cannot meet zoning requirements for parking
- Lack of understanding of the applicable zoning regulations and permit/license process

Residential and live-work uses not permitted

- No possibilities to use their spaces as live-work
- They all have issues with licenses for their homes and/or businesses
- Living there without a permit
- They know that more people would like to move to the avenue and use the spaces as "live-work" but could not buy properties because of the City's policy

Insufficient space / not viable space

- Not enough space for typical industrial uses
- Not affordable or viable for typical industrial uses

- Hard to attract large manufacturing tenants
- The area is more suited to smaller tenants
- Finding a space for industrial uses and the term of the lease

Unsafe / undesirable place to visit

- Clients find it a rough area
- Inadequate lighting at night
- Dangerous to cross Dufferin St without traffic lights
- Cars speeding between Ossington and Dufferin
- Limited patio space – conflict with loading and parking
- Area attracts creative uses, but not necessarily high volume of customers – eg. Florist shop does lots of deliveries but doesn't have a lot of customers coming to the location

Insufficient Parking

- Parking shortage on Geary Avenue
- Limited parking – the business needs more parking, particularly for patrons, but the property is too small to provide on-site parking and if on-site parking were permitted (1-2 spaces), the curb cut would require removal of on-street parking

Conflict with adjacent Neighbourhood

- Noise complaints from residents in the existing townhouses at Geary Ave and Lightbourn Avenue – people leaving events at ~3 a.m. are a nuisance to the neighbourhood

Site contamination

- Contaminated site (i.e. change of use is a challenge)

3. How has Geary Ave changed over the last 5-10 years?

Geary Avenue has substantially changed over the last 10 years as an evolving mix of uses and improvements to the public realm have made it a more desirable place to visit. Automotive uses have declined while new office space, food and beverage production and sales, and creative industrial uses now largely characterize the non-residential uses. Informal music and event venues have continued to find ways to operate on an occasional basis despite zoning restrictions. Geary Avenue has recently become a somewhat trendy social destination with the emergence of quality eating and drinking establishments in combination with eclectic creative uses. Pedestrian activity has substantially increased, in part due to improvements to local parks and open spaces.

Evolving mix of uses:

- Uses have changed: now more light industrial and commercial uses
- Less mechanics
- Use to have more dirty automotive uses

- Hybrid businesses are more common
- More food businesses
- Shift to food and beverage production and sales. Continues to expand
- More office space
- Now more creative industrial uses
- Now a more interesting mix of uses
- Once had a lot of illegal music places/rave venues
- But we want the right crowd of people – not the nightclub crowd
- Increase in underground music venues
- Used to include more informal event spaces

More desirable to visit, more of a destination

- Now much more high profile. It's a destination now.
- Now you need a reservation for dinner at a restaurant on Geary Ave
- Geary became much busier
- It is nicer than before
- More public awareness in the media about Geary Ave – place for food and drink
- Businesses are staying open late which adds more people to the street
- Become top 10 areas in North America
- Locals can't enjoy because outsiders come.
- Used to be a more ugly street
- Businesses have invested a lot of money
- Now more stuff happening, more amenities, more cafés and restaurants (e.g. Greater Good)

More pedestrian activity

- Safer, even at night
- Much safer now – previously would not stay after 5 pm
- More people from the neighbourhood visit the green spaces
- Foot traffic has increased
- Street draws more people
- The park at Bartlett gets used a lot more
- The hydro corridor also gets used more – for dogs and soccer
- More young families in the area and they are coming to the park next to the hydro corridor
- Now more formalized parkland and open spaces
- Now more of a community
- Now more dog walkers
- Now the hydro corridor has been cleaned up – less debris

Reduced parking

- Sidewalk on the south side eliminated parking

Slower traffic or faster traffic (?)

- Moderately less of a drag strip
- Traffic and speed of traffic have increased

Less affordable

- Rents have gone up

4. What is your vision for Geary Ave over the next 10 years? How could Geary Ave be improved?

Businesses and creative enterprises would like to further establish Geary Avenue as a hub of creative industries that also allows a broader range of commercial and retail uses. Geary Avenue would benefit from branding and a street art partnership to promote the growing creative industrial community. Substantial improvements to the public realm are highly desired in order to further attract customers and pedestrian activity. Specifically, the streetscape should be improved with wider sidewalks, street trees, safer pedestrian crossings (especially across Dufferin Avenue), traffic calming and implementation of the Green Line plan.

The zoning bylaw should be less restrictive in order to allow more restaurants and retail uses but still include provisions to ensure a vibrant mix that includes creative industrial uses. Businesses would like more parking and loading facilities and opportunities to develop larger buildings to accommodate growing operations.

Expand commercial and industrial activity, improve branding

- Geary Avenue should be more commercial
- Much more commercial uses
- The auto industry can stay
- It is good the way it is but:
- Everyone doing the same thing for the same cost
- Exacting the same as what's happening now
- Finding ways to help existing businesses
- Keep everything the way it is but better
- Identify Geary Avenue as "Maker Valley" (unique – own little village – organically develop through slow steps)
- Increase industrial density
- Develop 3D gaming (see examples – NYC)
- Need bigger picture thinking
- Create a better sense of the Greenbelt by having local cafes and restaurants source their food from farms in the Greenbelt.
- More patio space
- More rooftop amenity space
- All mentioned that they would not like to see this place to become like Ossington
- They would like to see more restaurants, maybe a gym

More emphasis on creative enterprises

- Exhibit photography
- More public art – murals on sides and fronts of buildings
- Bring life to the street through art – make Geary Ave a destination as an art walk
- Work with START (Street Art Toronto)

Improve street / public realm

- To improve the streetscape to be more pedestrian friendly
- More amenity areas
- They would like to see more community garden space
- Young families need more space
- More trees and more landscape but to maintain the character of the area and the industrial feeling
- Should be more walkable
- People should park along the street and not on the sidewalk. It is not the downtown area and restaurants don't need parking spaces.
- Widen sidewalks
- Street use should be prioritized for delivery and pedestrians
- Better connections to west end of Geary Ave
- Complete the Green Line as planned
- Better pedestrian/cycle crossings to connect Green Line parkland
- Better pedestrian crossings at Dufferin Street (especially), Ossington Ave and Bartlett St – provide traffic lights
- Provide traffic calming measures on Geary Ave between Bartlett St and Dovercourt St
- More street trees
- Add a bike lane
- Add a bike share station
- Consider one-way traffic

More activity

- "More of what is already here"
- Geary Ave festival – a way to celebrate, showcase and promote businesses on Geary
- Have a business wayfinding map on Geary Ave
- Create list of potential informal partnerships – e.g. Ryerson, Launchpad
- Collaboration with the community
- Animate and activate
- Create an "Ugly Street Festival"
- How will the new project on the Galleria site influence the neighbourhood and the avenue
- More activities but to keep it minima. To facilitate but not to plan it

More permissive zoning:

- Relax zoning rules – no more 80% and 20% rule for uses (primary use and ancillary use). A 50% and 50% for uses would be better
- Personal Service Shop use should be allowed – eg. Barber shop
- Look at examples – Wynwood in Miami; Dumbo in Brooklyn (mixed manufacturing)
- Create a greenhouse hub "Cannabis Valley"
- At 950 Dupont St, provide for institutional uses and music uses
- Allow more uses but limit certain uses (e.g. restaurants) to only a certain percentage of properties or GFA on Geary Avenue

More parking and loading

- More parking required to meet the needs of the businesses on Geary Ave

- Loading areas can stay
- Leave boulevard parking alone
- Need a public parking lot (Green P)
- Create a loading depot to help facilitate shipping/loading
- Three pools of parking

Improvements to existing buildings, bigger buildings

- More renovations to existing buildings
- They don't mind if buildings will go higher, 3-5 floors
- Provide for 6-8 storey development

Less event space / less late night events

- Event areas are a problem, especially since these people are coming for a few hours and leaving. They are not part of the community
- End events at 1 a.m., which will significantly reduce noise and nuisance on existing residents. Patrons who stay at events much past 1 a.m. are typically more of a nuisance than those that leave before/at 1 a.m.

Allow live-work uses

- Since the members raised the need for live-work spaces the councillor suggested to look at the possibility to have different character areas along the avenue

5. What can the City do to help your business and cultural enterprise?

The most important action the City can take to support existing businesses and creative enterprises on Geary Avenue is to proactively rezone the area to allow a greater range of non-residential uses including restaurants, retail and services uses and event venues. Traffic calming measures and other improvements to the public realm would make Geary Avenue a more pedestrian friendly environment that would attract more customers and patrons. More frequent transit service and more public parking opportunities would also help draw customers. The City should also promote the area as a hub of creative industries.

More permissive zoning while maintaining a balanced mix of non-residential uses

- Change the zoning to allow more commercial uses
- The City needs to be more flexible with the ZBL
- All mentioned positively the help that they received from Cecilia
- It took them a long time to receive a permit, and it is a temporary one for 2-3 years
- Relaxing the zoning
- Not too much interference from the City
- Find a way to allow the vibrancy without allowing the restaurants to take over (50/50 breakdown would be better)
- Remove the provision in the zoning for the floor to ceiling wall separation for manufacturing and ancillary use [this was done as part of the Cask Force report]
- Updated zoning with more relevant uses – retail, yoga studio, convenience store

- 950 Dupont St should be a heritage designated building but not restricted to limit contemporary application
- Allow 950 Dupont St to be used to host major events
- Support night life uses
- More flexible zoning – allow event venues, allow for ticketed audiences
- Faster planning approvals

More traffic calming, make it more pedestrian friendly

- Add a traffic light at Dufferin and Geary
- Dupont is not pedestrian friendly
- When they have to go south they avoid the underpasses and use the at grade connection
- Add lanes and connections between buildings – increase porosity.
- Better pedestrian and bicycle access
- Create a new railway crossing for pedestrians and cyclists near the west end of Geary Avenue to provide direct access to Galleria and Galleria public parking – either an at-grade crossing or a bridge

Improve parkland and better maintenance of public realm

- The Green Line should be better designed and better maintained
- More community gardening
- More street cleaning and snow removal, especially next to the open spaces
- Geary is neglected!
- There are a lot of informal activities in the open spaces, it should be better supervised

More parking

- Provide more parking
- Provide public parking at the Galleria development
- More parking options

Better transit

- More frequent bus service, especially on Dupont St

Subsidize / promote businesses

- Rent subsidies
- Put together a festival to promote the area
- Promote an office hub

Permit live-work space

- There needs to be a definition for a live-work space

6. Is your property used as an event venue? If so, how often? For what type of events?

Approximately 8 properties on Geary Avenue were identified as providing informal event venues that are typically used 3 to 4 times per month on average, which represents a significant concentration of small scale event venues.

Description of event venues

- Yes – by one of the tenants – approx. 1 time per week.
- The garage is used for events
- Yes - ### Geary Ave
- Yes – unit next to ### Geary Ave
- Yes - Second floor of ### Geary Ave
- ### Dupont St – 50-200 people plus 2000 in the shed.
- ### Geary Ave: 2-3 events per month, typically Thursday-Saturday until 1 a.m. Mostly music events, also weddings, theatre, art gallery
- ### Geary Ave: 3-4 events per month, may go as late as 3 a.m. Events include art gallery, corporate shows, trunk shows
- ### Geary Ave: ~3 events per week (they have a permanent liquor license), events often go to 2-4 a.m. Events include fundraisers, art shows, birthdays, live music, DJ parties, private parties

7. Are you supportive of traffic calming measures to encourage pedestrian activity?

Stakeholders unanimously agreed that traffic calming measures are desirable, provided they don't significantly impact parking and loading spaces.

Support for traffic calming

- Yes, in principle, provided there would not be a significant impact on parking and loading space
- Yes, it should be more pedestrian friendly
- Speed bumps
- There was a discussion about a one way street opportunity and the residents agreed while the business owner did not
- There should be bike lanes
- The sidewalks should be friendly, maintained and clean of snow. Asking whose responsibility it is to clean next to the Green Line
- Yes - but no bump outs where loading and unloading are needed
- Traffic calming along the park and hydro area
- Yes – currently dangerous for pedestrians
- Improve pedestrian connections, not just traffic calming
- Yes (unanimous). Also necessary to keep pedestrians safe