



## Bay Cloverhill Community Association

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# North Downtown Yonge Street Planning Framework

**Community Meeting**

**St. Basil's Church**

August 24, 2011

## **Response of Bay Cloverhill Community Association (BCCA)**

(6pages)

The BCCA wishes to thank the Planning Department for their efforts and preparations for this meeting. We value the opportunity for community input on Historic Yonge Street. The history of this street is of great importance to our community, our city, our province and our nation.

The BCCA, The Church Wellesley Neighbourhood Association, BENA, numerous community residents, friends of heritage preservation (all living in or near the Study Area of this document) engaged in prolonged and serious discussion to prepare a common response to the Planning Framework for North Downtown Yonge. The document prepared by CWNA is the outcome of those many hours of research, discussion, planning, and writing.

The BCCA totally endorses the statements made by the CWNA as outlined at the August 24 public meeting (. We have attached the CWNA report to the end of this BCCA response document. (Appendix A)

The CWNA report can be found at: <http://www.cwna.ca/concerns>

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The CWNA document (Appendix A) is limited in its focus to heritage issues and height issues. A complete community has a broader spectrum. In addition to residential spaces, both commercial/retail and business possibilities must be considered and included in a planning process.

- Residential: a balanced community must include a broad variety of housing possibilities including varied heights, varied costs, accessibility.
- commercial/retail options which, like residential buildings, require a varied spectrum of possibilities.
- Business/office : Plan sufficient space for buildings designed specifically to accommodate business needs. Again, the full range of possibilities is the ideal situation.

The BCCA suggests that a full range of not only residential buildings but also commercial and business structures be considered in the North Downtown Yonge Planning Framework. Such a rich mix has the potential to stimulate the desired vitalizing elements needed in this downtown community.

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In addition, the BCCA respectfully suggests 3 large tasks that we believe should be included in the Planning Framework Document.

If tackled and successfully completed these 3 tasks would serve to validate the North Downtown Yonge heritage and enhance the collective local neighbourhoods, the local retailers and, ultimately, the city of Toronto.

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## **Task 1. Develop a Heritage Conservation District**

A community group would volunteer to prepare a map showing what we consider should be the outline border of such an HCD.

The outline of the HCD would twist back and forth to include the heritage buildings in the area from Charles Street to College Street, and Church Street to Bay Street.

A group of community volunteers is prepared to begin immediately to produce a first draft of such a map and also to work on the HCD project to its completion. The volunteers would seek the assistance of the Toronto Heritage Services. A significant amount of money AND a very large army of volunteers would be part of the plan to move ahead.

This section of Yonge Street has some of the last best remnants of the original Yonge Street.

## **Task 2. Prepare a Cultural Map**

This section of Yonge Street has a rich artistic/cultural/music history which includes well known Canadians – Gordon Lightfoot, Ronnie Hawkins, Joni Mitchell -- and less well known Canadians, too. Coffee Shops, nightclubs and , Cultural centres popped up in the area which allowed young musicians and artist to perform in clubs like The Bohemian Club on St Nicholas Street, a nightclub at 5 St. Joseph Street, “A” Space a little farther north on St. Nicholas Street to name but 3 of many.

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The BCCA suggests that a committee be established with members from the combined communities with the task of creating a history of the artistic and cultural life of the Yonge Street area. It would require the compilation of as comprehensive a list as possible of the people, the artists, the activities, the locations, and, of course, the stories about this historic section of Yonge Street.

Besides the written history, a cultural map of the area would be created by placing the facts on a ‘North Downtown Yonge Cultural Map’.

A North Downtown Yonge Cultural website with the same information would be created.

An individual has come forward with an offer to create such a website.

## **Task 3. Public Parks**

The BCCA suggests that a study of the area be done to determine logical park sites to be procured and developed. This North Downtown Yonge area is extremely park deficient. Additional public parks are needed to serve the increased population coming to the area through new residential development projects.

There are many sites in this study area that are potential development sites BUT these same sites are, at the same time, EXCELLENT public PARK SITES.

Here are 2 possible sites that could be tagged to be procured for public parks:

***Site 1: 11 Wellesley Street West which is currently a hoarded site.***

This site is large enough to provide a children’s playground, a community centre and other public park facilities – all in extreme deficit in the community.

***Site 2: the Green P Parking Lot on the south side of Wellesley Street across from the Wellesley Subway Station.***

This would add to the Linear Parks -- one more small park to continue the series of small parks linked together above the subway system – running from Charles Street East in the north to Alexander Street in the south end of the study area.

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***Other Actions That Could Be Undertaken Immediately:***

1. **Public Park Beautification:** In addition, a beautification and enhancement of the existing linear parks might be undertaken to make these heavily used parks an attractive space for everyone. Interest has been expressed to begin this action immediately.
2. Although more difficult, find a way to remove the signage on the heritage buildings on Yonge Street – signage that is hiding and in some cases destroying the heritage qualities of several of the buildings in this study area.

***Important Future Action to Provide Funding for Heritage Work:***

In future developments approved in the area, the BCCA would support the designation of Section 37 funds to provide funding for heritage projects in the Historic Yonge District.

Example for Use of Section 37 Funds: Museum of Yonge Street History

***The GOAL of the BCCA Suggestions:***

***--would be to develop Yonge Street in such a way that it can avoid the several deficits that have been engendered by the heavy intensification of Bay Street.***

***Bay Street Community:***

Over the past 10 to 15 years, Bay Street has become a very TALL STREET. The tall buildings through flaws of design have resulted in an accumulation of characteristics that are

- detrimental to The development of strong communities
  - Detrimental to a safe environment
  - Detrimental to a strong retail/commercial environment
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There has been a serious burden on the residents of the Bay Street community, namely, the BCCA.

The residents of Bay Street have been required to provide a resistance to what should be considered BAD DEVELOPMENT. Good architecture, interesting designs, varied designs, designs to support community development, high quality materials are too often lacking.

These community problems have increased over time because of an Accumulated impact created by the many tall residential developments.

**Shortcomings of Bay Street that could have been Avoided by GOOD DEVELOPMENT:**

1. **Sunlight** –a) Residential: Sunlight is decreasing and shadow is increasing for all residents. B) Park: In addition to the shadow cast on residential buildings, another special concern is the increase in shadow cast on the few small parks in the neighbourhood. These parks were not named as first level parks in the Tall Buildings Downtown Study and, consequently, have no sun protection.
2. **Sky** –skyview is getting smaller and smaller with towers obliterating the sky
3. **Wind** – The wind tunnel effect of towers on Bay Street has created an increase of wind at many intersections eg Bay and Wellesley At times, it is truly dangerous for pedestrians, especially children, the elderly, and the disabled.
4. **public Playground for children/grandchildren** –does not exist.

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**5. *heritage Buildings*** – do not exist on Bay Street as they have all been demolished in the past 90 years starting with the building of Bay Street in the 1920's and continuing to the present with the recent demolition of the McLaughlin Car Dealership. Now that Bay Street is almost fully developed, development is pushing onto the smaller side streets where heritage buildings still exist but are being threatened by complete demolition except for the facades –heritage buildings lost to facadism.

**6. *Community centre/meeting space*** – does not exist

**7. *Retail opportunities***—limited to fast food, finger nail grooming, some restaurants, some services in units on the first floor commercial space. The major grocery stores and better facilities are at a distance – Bloor Street or south of College Street . There is very little browsing opportunity that would encourage pedestrians to stroll or explore. The more interesting retail spaces tend to be in the small shops on side streets on Church Street or on Yonge Street.

**8. *Transient community***– because of nearby universities, many students live on Bay Street with no intention of ever contributing to or becoming part of the community. Developers build very small expensive units which have little attraction for families or long-term residents.

**(Approved by the BCCA members at the General Meeting held on September 8, 2011.)**

**Norman Waite,  
BCCA President**

**Date:**

## **Appendix A**

The next 2 pages are the submission of the Church Wellesley Neighbourhood Association as presented by Robert Fabian to the Community Meeting held at St. Basil's Church on August 24, 2011.

## **APPENDIX A:**

### **North Downtown Yonge Street Planning Framework**

On Wednesday, August 17, 2011, representatives from five downtown neighbourhood associations were invited to discuss their concerns regarding the Planning Framework that is to be developed by the City. The five neighbourhood associations are:

- Greater Yorkville Residents Association
- Bay Cloverhill Community Association
- Bloor East Neighbourhood Association
- Church Wellesley Neighbourhood Association
- McGill Granby Residents Association

The day began shortly after 9:30 am with a presentation by Al Rezoski from City Planning. He explained the process they are going through in the development of this Planning Framework. It's clear they are working under considerable pressure – very limited resources and a very tight time frame. He invited our attendance at the public meeting scheduled for Wednesday, August 24, 6:30–9:00 pm in St. Basil's Church Parish Hall (in the basement) 50 St. Joseph St.

Most of the day was taken up with a discussion of the concerns of the neighbourhoods. Everyone recognized the importance of the stretch of Yonge Street from Carlton/College to Bloor. This is the iconic “Yonge Street” that is known across Canada and beyond. One of the participants told the story of the couple from Texas who spent most of a day looking for the “Yorkville” about which they had heard so much. They had to be told that “Yorkville” as home of the folk arts was gone, replaced by high end retail and high end condos.

This stretch of Yonge Street was recognized as much more than just an iconic street. It provides a critical pedestrian connection from our neighbourhoods to the important downtown areas. It connects us to the Eaton Centre and to Kensington Market. It connects us to the Art Gallery of Ontario and to the Royal Ontario Museum. It connects us to the live theaters on Yonge, King, and Front Streets. It connects us to the Four Seasons Centre and to Roy Thompson Hall. It connects us to Ryerson University and the University of Toronto. It connects us to the financial centre of Canada at King and Bay. And it provides a very important pedestrian “glue” linking our downtown neighbourhoods.

This pedestrian corridor is an essential element in living, working, and relaxing in inviting and attractive downtown neighbourhoods. The continued presence of attractive downtown neighbourhoods is important for a number of reasons. Prominent among them are financial considerations. Toronto draws people who want to live in the downtown. Toronto draws businesses that are attracted by the creative downtown presence. Toronto draws tourists from far and wide who are attracted by our downtown. Much of our financial success depends on the presence of inviting and attractive downtown neighbourhoods.

We prepared an initial list of the characteristics of this stretch of Yonge Street that contribute to its success as the downtown pedestrian corridor:

- **Safe** – People feel safe on Yonge Street. Safety was recognized by all participants as an essential precondition for a successful downtown pedestrian corridor.
- **Diverse** – Yonge Street offers something for everyone. Its diversity encourages and supports an openness and diversity in our neighbourhoods.
- **Heritage** – The stretch of Yonge Street has great nineteenth century retail heritage, with perhaps a greater heritage presence than anywhere else in Ontario.
- **Green** – Yonge Street itself may not be as green as we would like, but the areas immediate off Yonge Street do provide the green reality that's so important for people.
- **Human Scale** – People aren't dwarfed by concrete and glass towers. Most of the building on this stretch of Yonge Street are approachable, human scale structures.
- **Culture** – There is no homogeneous cultural presence here. Restaurants cover a wide spectrum, providing different cuisines, at different price points. No culture is excluded.
- **Mosaic** – It adds up to the kind of diverse and varied mosaic that is often seen as an important and attractive Canadian reality – perhaps nowhere better represented than here.

There was a unanimous sense among the participants that a Yonge Street transformed into a concrete and glass canyon would no longer provide this vital social glue. Bay Street is a ready to hand example of what could happen were development not guided by concerns such as those on our list. But we recognize that we have only taken the first steps towards identifying the characteristics of Yonge Street that need to be supported and protected.

What planning guidelines should be put in place now? There are threatening development proposals on the table. New real estate parcels are being assembled. More development proposals can be expected. We recognize that stopping Yonge Street development would not be possible, nor would it be desirable. But until there is a far better understanding of the social role of Yonge Street, prudence argues for only modest development along this stretch of Yonge Street.

We see modest development as preserving the historical presence along Yonge Street. Any rebuilding within the first 30 meters from the Yonge Street property line would be subject to a height restriction of 4 storeys (not to exceed 14 meters) and a design that "works" in the context – the location given all the historical buildings in the immediate neighbourhood. Creativity that "works" with what is around it can be an asset but must be compatible in scale and, although possibly "dramatic", compatible in style with the neighbouring heritage buildings. The next 50 meters should be limited to no more than twelve storeys. Tall buildings on this stretch of Yonge Street should start no closer than 80 meters from the Yonge Street property line. We propose that the City adopt these guidelines, at least as an interim step.

We must not allow Yonge Street to go the way of Bay Street. These interim guidelines would prevent such a transformation from happening. It's the prudent interim step for the City to take.

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