

April 19, 2012

Chair, Civic Works Committee
City of London

Dear Councillor Usher;

I am writing in regards to the **2012 Phase II Horton Street Reconstruction Project**. In particular, I would like to register my unqualified support for the improvements to the streetscape that are part of this proposal, namely the inclusion of median planters and the improvements to the pedestrian walkways. I am a resident of SoHo, I live near the improvement area on Simcoe Street, and I see these improvements as important to the further development of SoHo's image, and consistent with our vision of the area as a vibrant and liveable neighbourhood.

As I understand the proposal, significant sewer upgrades are required to separate the sanitary sewers from the storm sewers here, and that the City has kindly proposed these additional above-ground improvements that can be done at the same time. I have reviewed these additional improvements in a document sent to home owners late last summer, and I have attended two previous meetings with City staff who explained them to us. And so I feel I am familiar with the proposed improvements, and have considered their potential benefits and drawbacks. I have twice written letters in support of this proposal- one last year, another in February 2012- but I just wanted to reiterate here for your Committee, one last time, why I support these above-ground improvements.

First, the stretch of Horton Street in question is, to be blunt, pedestrian un-friendly, maybe even 'pedestrian hostile'. The extremely narrow boulevards that run along the street for these two blocks make the traffic feel 'too close'. The width of the roadway here is also exceptionally unappealing at four lanes, as if it is designed for motor vehicles alone, with no consideration for any other mode of transportation. I feel that boulevard plantings will create a buffer between the roadway and pedestrian walkway, and will better integrate the pedestrian walk with the existing buildings that front Horton Street. Right now, the walk way feels as if it extends from the roadway, and not out from the building fronts if that makes sense. The broader boulevard thus, to me, is a wonderful idea that will encourage pedestrian traffic.

Second, this stretch of Horton Street is also difficult to bike along- cars move pretty fast, there are four lanes worth of them, making quick turns and lane changes. Anything that would provide some relief of the 'car traffic free-for-all' that now characterizes the stretch is very welcome. I feel that the median planters would help in this regard. For example, the same types of improvements along Wellington Street in the Horton-South Street corridor have made a tremendous difference in calming traffic, and this stretch of Wellington feels fairly safe for biking.

Third, a large part of this stretch of Horton Street is just ugly; the scale of the roadway is far out of proportion with almost all of the buildings- the roadway seems gigantic compared to the tiny little buildings off on the edge. Again, this is a problem that can be easily remedied as it was with the median planters on Wellington that visually scale-down the roadway.

Fourth and finally, I support these above-ground improvements because they include plants. We have a fairly heavy burden of pavement on this edge of SoHo, and anything that can break up that concentration is not just aesthetically appealing, it is also just better overall for the environment. Because we are close to the river, and because we have lots of mature trees, our neighbourhood is useful habitat for lots of wildlife, especially birds and insects. Every little thing we can do here to support them and the ecosystems they need we should try to do. If this proposal succeeds, maybe we could even use appropriate plants that are native to our eco system here.

Thank you very much for your time and consideration. Thank you for fixing the sewers here, and thank you as well for your consideration of the needs of the people of SoHo.

Sincerely,

Wendy Russell
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