

Planning and Environment Planning Committee – March 1, 2021

Re: Core Area Community Improvement Plan

I live in the Core. I am also someone that actively connects with Core residents to raise awareness and support for issues that impact the Core. I do this usually by door knocking. I have, for example, spoken to those residents that live in the vintage apartments above the stores on Dundas St.

And I fundamentally believe that the city is misguided on its approach to revitalizing the Core. For example, you can't run a business if your windows are being smashed on a regular basis. I also think that the focus of the Core Area Community Improvement Plan is too focused on bring people to the downtown and is neglecting those residents that already live downtown as it is those residents that would be the ground support for the businesses in the Core.

For example, the city is dead wrong as to who lives in the Core and especially who lives on Dundas Street above the stores. In my neighbourhood of North Talbot, we still have some affordable rentals. We have a school bus that picks up young children off of Talbot St. and buses them to school. We have non-for-profit housing, housing for disability, public housing, student housing, wealthy residents in mansions and a lot of long-term residents renting. Many of the rentals are older individuals of lower income. If city officials calculate that the population of the core is younger rather than mixed, it is because the older residents tend to avoid those businesses that do not cater to them such as the businesses on Richmond Street. Our neighbourhood also has several houses that remain whole and not craved up but are currently limited to groups of students of 5 or more. The report does not recognize these housing types.

The Core Area Community Improvement Plan fails to address the core area residents and their role in supporting local businesses. I would argue that these residents are the backbone of support and would suggest that taking care of local residents should be a primary focus of any plan to stabilize the downtown.

I also believe that this plan is singularly focused on one type of business but the Core area is overwhelmingly historical with vintage storefronts – many of them tiny that would be best suited to entrepreneurial businesses that would be unique to the Core. That in turn would attract people looking for a different shopping experience than what would be available in malls and accentuate the historical character of the core. This plan ignores what is beautiful about the downtown. It is right there is front of you but you are not looking. You are trying to reshape the core rather than bring out what is already unique and attractive.

And I understand the frustration of residents that do not live in the core, do not visit the core and have no desire to shop in the core, having to foot the bill for these plans that are misguided and fail. Most people want to shop, play and work where they live and visit another district for its uniqueness. I feel this plan does nothing to lift and stabilize the core. For example, while nice, I did not think removing curbs and rebricking Dundas St would attract anyone to the core. One doesn't really notice a road. A beautiful leafy streetscape might because there is nothing like that anywhere else in the city – not even in Wortley Village or Old East Village.

In closing I feel that the homeless population is part of the core and I was deeply disappointed when the city removed the parkette at Covent Market because it became a gathering spot for people on the street. Personally, the parkette gave a sense of community – not my community – but someone else's community, and in many ways I found this better than having people scattered across the streets.

Thank You

AnnaMaria Valastro