

COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE - JANUARY 13 2009

YONGE STREET CORRIDOR – STREETSCAPING FILE #15.97

Recommendation

The Commissioner of Planning recommends:

1. That Council approve the attached resolution addressing streetscaping on Yonge Street; and
2. That the resolution be forwarded to York Region, the Town of Markham and the Town of Richmond Hill.

Economic Impact

This resolution will have no financial impact on the City.

Communications Plan

Approval of the resolution will be communicated by letter to York Region and neighbouring municipalities, and through the public consultation process associated with the Yonge Street Area Study.

Purpose

The purpose of this report is to submit a resolution for Council's consideration regarding the need for a major streetscaping initiative on the Yonge Street corridor, to be led and financed by York Region in support of public transit initiatives.

Background - Analysis and Options

In 2006 the City, in concert with the Town of Markham, completed a study (and approved OPA 669) pertaining to the properties fronting Yonge Street within the Thornhill Heritage Conservation District. The study supported a modest amount of redevelopment in the area, and established streetscape requirements in association with a surface transit facility. YRRT was directly involved in the study. Consequently, similar detailed streetscape design work was undertaken north and south on the Yonge corridor to create an improved environment for pedestrians and transit. Given the scale of public investment in transit infrastructure, York Region has a large stake in ensuring that the appropriate environment is established on Yonge Street and thereby ensure transit ridership goals can be achieved.

York Region Rapid Transit is now moving quickly toward completing the Environmental Assessment for the extension of the Yonge subway. An announcement is expected in the Spring of 2009 on Provincial approval of the extension, and possibly its funding. In the event that the subway is not approved, a surface transit facility is expected to proceed. As soon as the final form of transit infrastructure is confirmed, the detailed design phase will likely be initiated.

The introduction of higher order transit infrastructure in the Yonge corridor presents a unique opportunity for Vaughan, Markham, Richmond Hill, and York Region to significantly upgrade the quality of the urban environment through improvements to the streetscape. Indeed, for the Yonge corridor to become a truly transit-supportive area, significant improvements are needed to create an attractive and comfortable pedestrian environment throughout the corridor and, in particular, in close proximity to planned transit stations. Yonge Street is recognized as Canada's longest and most important street, and functions as a key gateway to Vaughan, Markham, Richmond Hill, York Region and Toronto. As such, special attention to its image and potential is warranted.

The subway, although underground, represents a significant streetscaping opportunity, in that the station areas require 'cut and cover' construction. This requires the reconstruction of the entire Yonge Street right-of-way for a length of 200 – 250 metres at each station. The approaches to the proposed bridge over the East Don River would also require reconstruction. A streetscape plan, detailed and costed, would allow for the costs of the work to be anticipated in the overall cost of the project and guide the reconstruction. As well, once a detailed streetscape plan is in place, the municipalities can require the reconstruction of the curb-to-building face area related to new development. Other implementation measures (e.g. governments up fronting the construction and charging back the work through area specific development charges) could also be considered, and should be discussed between the Region, affected local municipalities and other stakeholders.

Currently, City staff and consultants are working on the Yonge Street Area Study, in coordination with staff from the Town of Markham, York Region and City of Toronto. An objective of this work is to define a vision for the Yonge corridor which supports transit and promotes redevelopment at an appropriate scale and locations. However, for the corridor to achieve its full potential, a coordinated approach to built form, roadway design and streetscaping, which truly balances the needs of pedestrians, businesses, surface transit and vehicles, is essential. York Region is the key party with the authority, direct interest and means to implement the vision.

Therefore, a resolution (attached) has been drafted, requesting York Region to provide funding and develop a request for proposals in consultation with affected municipalities for a comprehensive and detailed streetscape study for the Yonge corridor. With Council's approval, this resolution would be forwarded to the Town of Markham and Town of Richmond Hill, and their Councils would be asked to approve a similar resolution. This initiative is necessary now in order to ensure that the streetscaping work can be concluded in time to coincide with the Spring '09 transit decision, and design work to follow.

Relationship to Vaughan Vision 2020/Strategic Plan

Approval of the attached resolution is consistent with two Vaughan Vision 2020 Strategic Initiatives, specifically:

“support and coordinate land use planning for high capacity transit at strategic locations in the City”; and

“work with other levels of government to continue to support the expansion of the GO system and public/rapid transit”

Regional Implications

The Region is being requested to undertake and finance a major streetscaping initiative in support of the introduction of higher order transit infrastructure on the Yonge Street corridor.

Conclusion

This initiative is intended to establish an attractive, pedestrian-friendly and transit-supportive environment on the Yonge corridor in order to foster a high level of transit ridership on the planned transit services to be implemented there. Should Council concur with the resolution, it should be approved.

Attachments

1. Draft Council resolution

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Respectfully submitted,

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COUNCIL RESOLUTION:

WHEREAS Yonge Street is widely recognized as Canada's longest and most important street, and the gateway to York Region, the City of Vaughan, the Town of Markham, the Town of Richmond Hill, and the City of Toronto; and

WHEREAS the Region of York has identified the Yonge Street corridor as a high priority for investment in higher order public transit infrastructure; and

WHEREAS the cost-effectiveness of public investment in public transit depends upon achieving a high level of transit ridership; and

WHEREAS transit ridership goals will only be met if complemented by an urban environment which is attractive, pedestrian-friendly and complementary to the transit service, in terms of built form, roadway design and streetscaping; and

WHEREAS the design of transit facilities on Yonge Street is expected to begin early in 2009; and

WHEREAS reconstruction of significant parts of the Yonge right-of-way provides an opportunity to integrate an improved streetscape along the corridor; and

WHEREAS a comprehensive and detailed streetscape study, including cost estimates and implementation measures, is required to reflect the desired vision for the corridor complementing the transit service; and

WHEREAS the Region of York has the authority, direct interest and means to implement the Yonge Street vision; and

NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the Council of the City of Vaughan requests that the Region of York commit funding in its 2009 budget to a comprehensive and detailed streetscape study for the Yonge corridor generally north of Steeles Avenue, and expedite initiation of the study to ensure its completion in coordination with the detailed design and construction of subway-related works, in consultation with the City of Vaughan, the Town of Richmond Hill and the Town of Markham.