

YONGE- DUNDAS SQUARE

Strategic Plan 2019-2022





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Yonge-Dundas Square is a one acre, outdoor public space owned by the City of Toronto in the heart of the downtown core. The Square occupies the southeast corner of the busiest intersection in Canada, where Yonge Street and Dundas Street meet, and where over 150,000 people pass by daily. It is an incredibly unique environment – the surrounding buildings, streets, billboards, lights and activities are special, and there’s nowhere else in Toronto like it.



ABOUT

Yonge-Dundas Square is open 365 days of the year and hosts hundreds of events annually. Community celebrations, theatrical events, concerts, receptions, promotions and a wide range of other events are hosted on the Square – events that appeal to residents and tourists alike and provide a showcase for local businesses.

Created over 15 years ago on the initiative of local community and elected leaders, Yonge-Dundas Square was established as a place for public programming and events. Along with construction of the Square came a unique and arms-length approach to its management. Governed by the *City of Toronto Act, 2006*, the operation of Yonge-Dundas Square is the responsibility of a Board of Management whose mandate and structure is determined by City Council.



YONGE-DUNDAS SQUARE BOARD OF MANAGEMENT

The Board of Management manages, operates, controls and maintains the activities of the Square on behalf of City Council as an outdoor public space. The Board of Management is directed by City Council to achieve the following three objectives:

OBJECTIVES



1.

Create a unique focal point in the downtown core to promote economic development activities and contribute to the cultural vitality of the community



2.

Provide a balance of commercial and community programming which appeals to local business and residents, and also provide city-wide attractions to Torontonians and visitors alike



3.

Promote a high quality of life in a safe, secure and live-able downtown

This Strategic Plan was developed in support of these objectives. It will guide the management of Yonge-Dundas Square over the next three years, from 2019 through to 2022.

Our Responsibilities as a Public Agency of the City

Toronto City Council delivers services and performs certain activities through agencies like the Yonge-Dundas Square Board of Management to focus on delivering specific policy objectives or services; enable independent decision making; and engage citizens in board decision-making, bring expertise, involve funders or fundraisers and use volunteer capacity.

The Yonge-Dundas Square Board of Management is one of several public agencies in the City of Toronto (others include the Toronto Parking Authority, Heritage Toronto, Board of Governors of Exhibition Place, etc.). Under the City of Toronto Act, 2006, the Yonge-Dundas Square Board of Management is a city board, and Council determines its mandates and structure. The make-up of the Board of Management reflects a range of the perspectives and interests required to achieve the Square's unique and public objectives. Members include:

- City Councillor for Ward 13
- Downtown Yonge Business Improvement Area
- Member of a Residents' Association (McGill-Granby Village)
- Ryerson University
- Massey Hall
- And five Citizen Appointees

Our Responsibilities as a Public Agency of the City (cont'd)



The mission of the Board of Management is to responsibly manage the Yonge-Dundas Square and enhance the vitality of downtown; to launch, promote, and operate Yonge-Dundas Square as an exciting commercial space borne from the passion of its community and the energy of commercial participation, so as to develop a positive perception by way of its activities, security, and cleanliness.

The staff team supporting the Board of Management includes a General Manager, a Manager of Events and Partnerships, a Manager of Operations, an Accounts Manager, Marketing and Communications Specialist, as well as Event Coordinators. The Square is functionally aligned with the City's Economic Development and Culture Division.

Our Focus on Place-Making

As a City of Toronto public space, our mandate is to serve the public, and our public is very varied. We take to heart the City's slogan "diversity is our strength", and as a result the Square has been adopted by many people and communities as their own. It has been referred to as "the city's living room", and it is used and visited by millions of people each year.

At a time when we see and experience all types of tensions in the world, the Yonge-Dundas Square team is committed to welcoming everyone and setting an example of how people with differences can live together. We take deliberate efforts to showcase this commitment through the type of events we host, whether it be Pride, multicultural celebrations, religious holidays, children's events, and many others. We are very thoughtful about what is programmed to uphold this commitment, and take our responsibility as stewards of this important public space seriously. We strive to provide a safe space for all.

Yonge-Dundas Square is unique in that it hosts both corporate and community events. Other squares often focus primarily on serving community and charitable organizations. The Square's curatorial model enables the team to work with clients to ensure the events provide experiences that contribute to increased turnout, media exposure, and better serve the local community. We help our clients to draw attention, maintain good relationships with our neighbours, and achieve a higher level of engagement and professionalism.

In addition to hosting events led by others, the Yonge-Dundas Square team delivers its own publicly programmed events on the Square. There are also a number of days where the Square is deliberately not programmed, the fountains are turned on, and the Square is open as an urban, public space for all.



Looking Back to the Early Days

In 1995 Yonge and Dundas was a very different place. Conversations were focusing on how to improve the area, and within a year (in 1996) the Yonge Street Regeneration Program would start – focusing on ways to improve Yonge from Queen up to College. The intent of the program was to:

- Improve the physical appearance of the area;
- Create a strong sense of place; and
- Attract a new retail and entertainment space, including a large megaplex cinema.



Since the beginning, there have been a range of voices working together to advocate for improvements to the area, including residents and businesses (particularly the Downtown Yonge Business Improvement Area and the McGill-Granby Village Resident Association), as well as local elected officials, with the effort to establish the square spearheaded by Toronto City Councillor Kyle Rae.

In 1998, as part of the Regeneration Program, Toronto City Council approved the expropriation and demolition of the buildings on the site (see photo) and the construction of Yonge-Dundas Square. That same year the City held a design competition for the one acre space, with Brown + Storey selected as the winning team by an international jury.

In 2001, the City of Toronto created the Yonge-Dundas Square Board of Management. The Board met for the first time in January 2002 and the Square opened to the public in May 2003, making 2004 the first full year of Square operations.



Our Unique Financial Model

The Yonge-Dundas Square team is responsible for programming of the Square in a way that achieves the Council-directed objectives. It is also responsible for generating the revenue required to cover its operational costs.

The core revenue stream at the Square is generated through event support services, and supplemented by revenue from signage, sponsorships, and the sight-seeing kiosk.

Ten years ago, the Square generated a revenue stream of about \$1 million dollars a year, with an additional operating subsidy of about \$600,000 from the City of Toronto to cover costs that are incurred even if no events are held at the Square (e.g. utilities, security, maintenance, and a small part of the administration). Today, the Square's revenue has tripled to over \$3 million annually, and no operating subsidy from the City is currently provided.



Significant Downtown Growth

Growth in the City of Toronto has exploded in the last 10 years, and with that growth has come many changes to the context in which Yonge-Dundas Square operates. Based on the work of the City of Toronto's Planning Division, we know that:

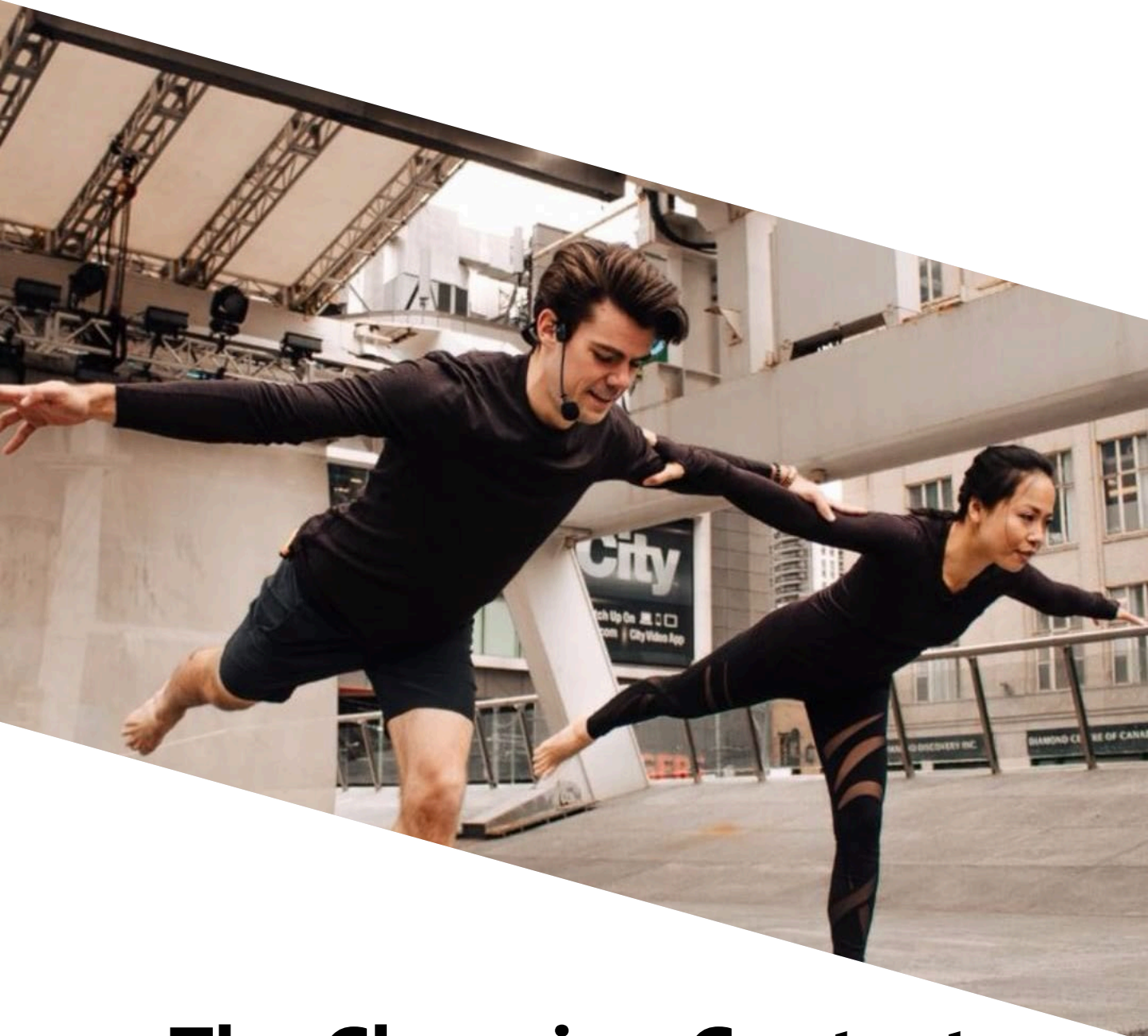
- Since 2006, downtown is growing at four times the rate of the city as a whole;
- 43% of those that live downtown are between the ages of 20 and 40;
- 830,000+ people are downtown over the course of a day, including residents, commuting workers and students, day trips and overnight visitors; and 292,000 Toronto residents travel to Downtown jobs from wards all across the City;
- One-quarter of Ontario's post-secondary students attend school downtown; and
- 5,000+ stores are located in downtown Toronto, with an 18% increase in average store size since 2001.

City planners have also discovered that as Torontonians begin living closer together, parks and squares and other areas in the public realm, like Yonge-Dundas Square, gain importance as places where people go to find a bit of space to relax, to get active or to connect with friends, neighbours and family.



We also know that this growth has brought changes to Yonge-Dundas Square. As illustrated on the map below, several new condos are planned or under development around the Square. We also have many new neighbours, including a growing Ryerson campus and student population, new anchor tenants at the Eaton Centre, and a major reinvestment being made in the revitalization of Massey Hall.

There are also several Yonge Street-specific initiatives that relate to the Square, like the “Yonge Love” campaign, “Celebrate Yonge Street”, the Downtown Yonge Street Planning Study, and initiatives to implement streetscaping and public realm improvements along Yonge from Queen to Gerrard.



The Changing Context

Given our central, busy, and high profile location, Yonge-Dundas Square is on the front lines of what's happening downtown. Our place-making role gives us early insights into important city building opportunities as well as pressing city management issues. Understanding and responding to our ever-changing context is essential to successfully fulfill our programming responsibilities, and have directly factored into the identification of focus areas for Yonge-Dundas Square in this three-year strategic plan.

The identity of Yonge-Dundas Square is both a great asset and a great challenge. The name of the Square means that it is easy to find. At the same time, asking 10 friends what they think Yonge-Dundas Square is, likely results in 10 different replies. The media often refers to Yonge-Dundas Square as a neighbourhood, which risks connecting negative activities in the surrounding area to the Square itself. And as a place surrounded by bright, active, and ever expanding advertising investments and intense commercial uses, there seems to be limited knowledge that the actual Square itself is a one acre public space owned by the City of Toronto and run by a publicly appointed Board of Management.

Our experience tells us that a busy and active Square contributes positively to Downtown's public realm. Knowing this, we are paying keen attention to a recent decrease we have seen in the number of community-based organizations hosting community festivals and family-friendly events at the Square. These organizations tell us that increasing costs are a factor and they also have concerns about travelling to downtown on crowded streets and transit. There may also be a decrease in the perception of safety at the Square.





Activating the Square during Toronto's colder months has been a consistent challenge. From April through October bookings are consistently high, with activities and events every weekend. Freezing temperatures and snow from November through March makes booking outdoor activities tough, but we are seeing an increase in the number of winter events in the city, including on the Square.

Finally, the Square continues to face challenges related to two other factors: the attraction of the Square as a location to protest, and competition from other City squares that (unlike Yonge-Dundas Square) are not required to operate on a cost recovery basis. These other squares are operated by various City Divisions and enable the delivery of community events at significantly lower costs.



Focus Areas for Next 3 Years

1) Be Bold in Asserting the Square's Identity

The Yonge-Dundas Square team will be bold in asserting the Square's identity. We will increase broad public knowledge and understanding that the Square is public, showcasing the Square's contribution to the city and the local neighbourhood. We will highlight the Square's commitment to serving all.

Goals:



- Users of the Square will know they are in a public space, with all of the opportunities and expectations around public conduct that go along with sharing public spaces



- The Square's neighbours will know they have a public place in their backyard to enjoy



- The broader community will know that the Square is an important shared and public place in the heart of downtown



- The City of Toronto elected officials and staff recognize Yonge-Dundas Square as a vital part of the Downtown public realm

Indicators of Success



Branding, messaging, and signage related to the Square, including on the Square itself, clearly communicates its public identity and differentiates itself from the surrounding sea of commercial uses



Seamless integration of Yonge-Dundas Square into all city-driven public realm improvement efforts and connectivity initiatives





2) Take a Leadership Role in Strengthening Connections and Partnerships

The Yonge-Dundas Square team will work hard to create and maintain strong connections between different organizations with shared interests in the neighbourhood. The team is also keen to work closely with the various divisions and staff teams within the City of Toronto to meet shared objectives, and will do this wherever possible.



Goals:

- Establish and maintain relationships between the Yonge-Dundas Square and its many residential, institutional, and commercial neighbours
- Increase information sharing between the Yonge-Dundas Square team and the City of Toronto, including all of its Divisions, agencies, and corporations
- Be recognized as a leader in place-making downtown
- Set an example of success for the management of other publicly-owned Squares
- Be sought out for the insights and expertise the Yonge-Dundas Square team has related to the opportunities, challenges, and evolving trends of life Downtown

Indicators of Success



Increase in the number of collaborative initiatives between Yonge-Dundas Square and the City of Toronto



Information is shared and feedback is sought from the local community, users of the Square, the City of Toronto, and other key stakeholders regarding the health of the Square

Be the go-to phone call for anyone working on the design and delivery of public initiatives Downtown



The relationship between Yonge-Dundas Square and other civic squares is clearly understood, and the competition between the Squares is minimized and ideally eliminated



3) Support the Vitality of the Local Neighbourhood

The Yonge-Dundas Square team will strengthen the ability of community groups to access the Square. We will demonstrate how the Square reflects community diversity and we will explain its social purpose. We will clearly demonstrate the Square's contribution to the health of Toronto's Downtown.



Goals:

- Be a go-to location for community-focused events, celebrations, and activities in the Downtown core
- Be a friendly, accessible, and safe place that contributes to peoples enjoyment of Yonge Street
- Demonstrate the contribution that community-driven events have in bringing new visitors to downtown
- Support the economic and commercial success of the Downtown

Indicators of Success



A collaborative system for supporting community events at the Square is established



Community groups report fewer barriers to holding events at the Square

There is an increase in the number of community groups (including local groups) holding events at the Square

There is an increase in positive media references to Yonge-Dundas Square



The Square maintains and strengthens its multiple, strong revenue streams

Our Strategic Planning Process and Moving Forward with Implementation

The development of this strategic plan was led by the Square’s Board of Management working closely with the General Manager and staff team. The strategic planning process also included connections with a number of the Square’s neighbours in the community, as well as discussion with City and public agency staff. This collaborative approach will continue as the strategic plan is implemented, demonstrating the ongoing role that the Yonge-Dundas Square team has in contributing to the life and vibrancy of Toronto’s Downtown Core. Annual public updates on progress toward implementing this strategic plan will be provided, and strategies for fostering and maintaining strong relationships with the local community will be ongoing.





yes.

yes.

One colour hard to see.

NORDSTROM

COMMERCIAL CENTER TORONTO

yes.

One colour hard to see.

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