

Unresolved Issues in Downtown Hamilton

DOWNTOWN REVITALIZATION TASK FORCE

REPORT #1

Issue:

1. Perceptions of Unsafe/unclean conditions

After receiving numerous complaints from downtown businesses and the public the City of Hamilton struck a Downtown Clean and Safe Task Force in 2003 to develop recommendations to improve the cleanliness and safety issues in the Downtown area. The Task force under the chairmanship of Ward Councilor Andrea Horwath conducted an environmental scan of the area and made recommendations as to the necessary increases in city and police services as well as other available partnerships in the Downtown. The report was unanimously passed by the former council last October with the recommendation that the report be incorporated into the budget discussions for 2004. To implement the report fully would mean an impact of approx. \$650,000 in increased services.

Recommendation: **That the Downtown Clean and Safe Task Force Report is supported by City Council.**

2. Crack Cocaine Problem

Most of the crimes that occur in Downtown are as a result of the need to buy drugs by the perpetrator. Purse snatchings, break and enters, car burglaries, etc. all result in thefts which will result in the selling of the stolen goods to buy drugs. One known address in the Downtown core has been used as a drug and prostitute centre and has generated over 300 police responses in the past year. This activity has resulted in the spreading out of criminal activity onto the streets of Downtown Hamilton even in broad daylight. Another spin-off of this type of activity has resulted in businesses in the area suffering from increased insurance rates.

Recommendation: **That the City of Hamilton in collaboration with the Chamber/local BIAs and landlords develop a new bylaw that incorporates Bill 30 (Profit from Crime Provincial Act) with a municipal bylaw similar to that of the Nuisance Bylaw enacted by Mississauga that will allow the city to close such operations.**

3. Concentration of Services in Downtown area

The Downtown core plays host to a multitude of social agencies, shelters, assisted care facilities, methadone clinics as well as the services at 31 King St. East which include Human Resources Development Canada (Unemployment Office), and the City's Department of Social Services

4. Loitering/panhandling

Many of the perceptions of an unsafe downtown stem from the feelings of many who visit downtown that there are too many people loitering in front of stores or in Gore Park. Both visitors and people who work downtown are also constantly being approached by panhandlers and asked for money or subjected to foul language by those who have nothing better to do than hang out in the park. Store owners have constantly called police with respect to young people who hang out in front of their front door and intimidate their customers as they come down to do business.

Recommendation: That 0 Tolerance on main streets in the entire Downtown area be implemented by the Police to discourage panhandling and loitering in the area.

5. Parking

Parking in the downtown area is becoming an increasing area of controversy – from the enforcement of parking policies in areas that currently have both on street and parking lot areas as well as the lack of available parking. The city is undertaking a parking study this year with respect to looking at availability of parking, the need for more parking, parking rates in downtown as well as revenues generated by parking meters/lots in all commercial areas in the City.

Recommendation: Finish the Parking study in consultation with the Chamber and other commercial districts and review parking policies in all commercial areas of Hamilton with the goal of equitable treatment for all.

6. Building Conditions

Many buildings in the older sections of Downtown Hamilton are in need of proper building standards enforcement to eliminate derelict buildings or bring them up to proper building codes. Stricter enforcement of property standards is needed to remove graffiti and other violations. Many neighbouring businesses have seen business decline as well as insurance rates escalate due to the unkempt nature of these types of inventory in downtown.

Recommendation: Meet with current owners to determine if buildings are structurally able to be saved, and investigate other options.

7. Hotels need upgrading

Conference and Convention business has a profound effect on the downtown economy. The numbers of conventions has declined over the past 8 to 10 years. Hotel room inventory in Downtown Hamilton is quite limited in numbers and in need of upgrade to standards provided by the industry. While it would be inappropriate for the City to provide funding for upgrade of facilities it would be suitable for the City of Hamilton to help stimulate the convention and

8. Busing Issues Downtown

The current configuration of busing in the Greater Hamilton area is as a hub and spoke type of system where all major routes come into the downtown core for redistribution to other routes and systems. This type of structure provides the most efficient use of equipment and the most expedient way for people to be moved around our city. However ridership on HSR has declined overall in the past 5 to 10 years despite the City's efforts to encourage the community to meet the Vision 2020 objectives. At present most routes are using the Gore Park vicinity to stop, drop off passengers and wait until their schedules permit another outward bound trip. This is having a major impact on drivers in and around the area who must juggle buses coming in and out of the Gore Park area. It is also having a negative impact on restaurant and patio owners in Downtown Hamilton whose patrons are subjected to increased brake and idling noise, and bus fume pollution from idling buses in the core. The city has been reviewing the need to increase the size of the MacNab Bus Terminal area and will in 2006 be budgeting for changes to that area to accommodate increased bus stop locations.

There has also been an increase in demand for busing to and from Downtown Hamilton to the west end of Hamilton for McMaster and Columbia College students which has caused an impact on those who wish to come into downtown Hamilton to shop or for health related appointments, etc. The HSR knew about the pending double cohort issue with respect to increased attendance at McMaster and yet no additional buses have been added to peak times despite additional registration and obvious bus revenue increases.

Recommendation: That the City of Hamilton push for an Environmental Assessment process to start with respect to the MacNab Street Bus Terminal project as soon as possible to speed up the planning process to remove buses from the Gore park area.

That a review of the bus usage and needs from and to west end (McMaster-Columbia College area) from downtown with respect to the double cohort issue and increased usage to facilitate the issue of patrons to downtown who cannot access public transportation when needed.