

PROPOSED

A GREAT YONGE STREET

A One-Day Conference

**Reading Week
Feb 20 – 24, 2012
Toronto, Canada**

Introduction

Yonge Street has had a long and storied history. It was the first street established by the British after the loyalist fled the American revolution. It's the "main street" of Toronto, providing a vital downtown pedestrian corridor. It's the route followed by the main north-south subway line. And it contains the last, best examples of 19th century commercial stores in Toronto.

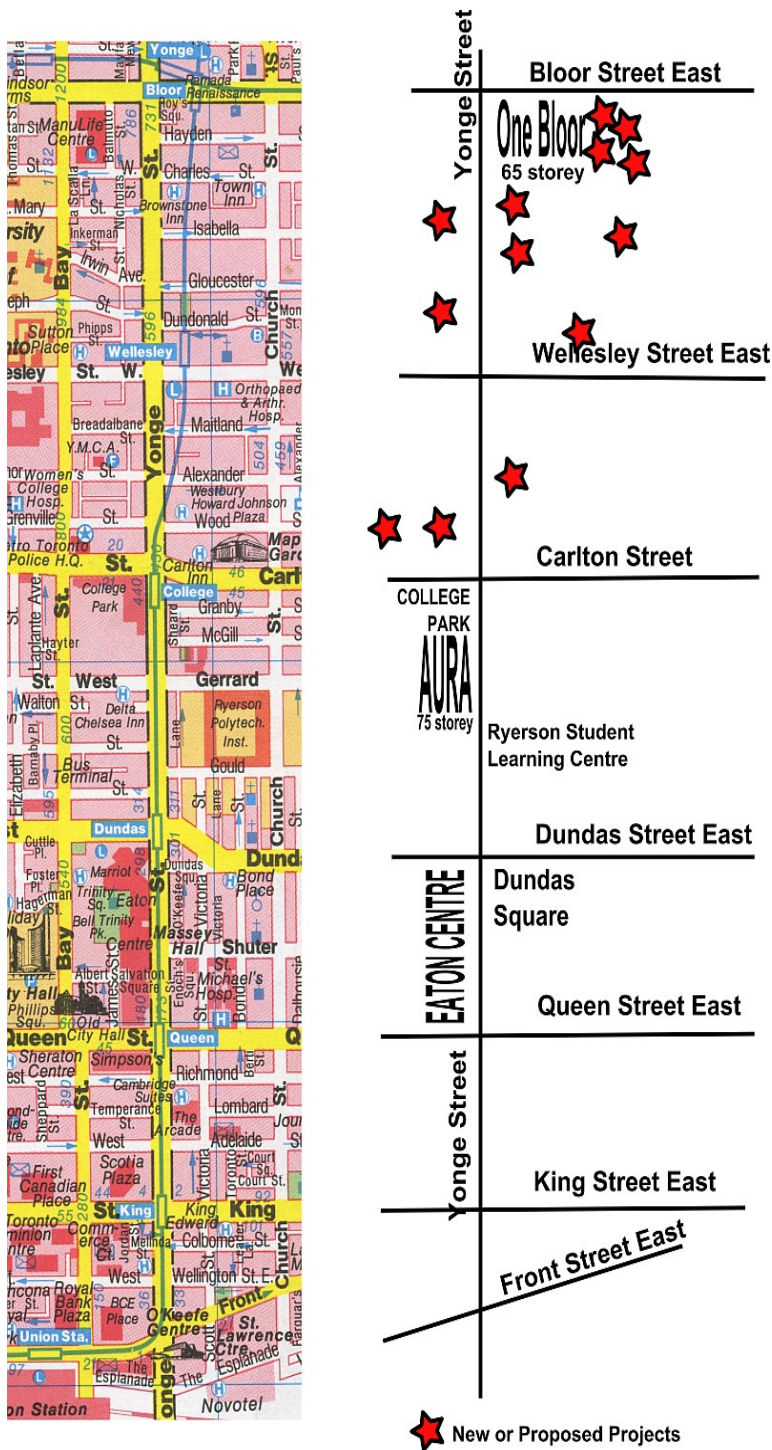
It has history. It has mind-share. And it's attracting intense developer interest. Within the few blocks of Yonge Street between College and Bloor there are over a dozen tall condos under construction or proposed. Without some larger vision of a Great Yonge Street it's all too easy to imagine a concrete and glass canyon replacing the human scale pedestrian corridor that is today's Yonge Street.

A one-day conference on "A Great Yonge Street" is being proposed as a way to help Toronto develop a public vision for what Yonge Street could become.

Contents

Introduction.....	1
Yonge Street Overview Map.....	2
Block Outline of Conference.....	3
The Great Yonge Street Goal.....	4
World-Class Great Streets.....	5

Yonge Street Overview Map



Bloor to Carlton – The “hot” development area. Contains the last, best examples of 19th century commercial buildings in Toronto.

College Park and AURA will fill the east side of Yonge. The west side has few development sites.

The Ryerson Student Learning Centre will be a landmark building

Dundas Square is Toronto's Times Square and the Eaton Centre is the premier Canadian downtown shopping centre

Everything south of Queen is part of the Canada's Financial Centre. Few development sites remain.

Block Outline of Conference

8:30 – 9:00	Registration	
9:00 – 9:15	Welcome	
9:15 – 10:00	Keynote	
10:00 – 10:45	Great Streets	
10:45 – 11:15	Break	
11:15 – 12:00	City Planning	
12:00 – 1:00	Lunch	
	Afternoon Stream A	Afternoon Stream B
1:00 – 2:30	1A session(s)	1B session(s)
2:30 – 3:00	Break	
3:00 – 4:30	2A session(s)	2B session(s)
4:30 – 5:00	Wrap-Up	

Possible speakers. Important: None of the people listed have been contacted. We have high expectations, but it's still too early to have any confirmed speakers.

Welcome – Sheldon Levy, President of Ryerson University

Keynote – David Crombie, former Toronto mayor

Great Streets – Allan Jacobs, author of *Great Streets*

City Planning – Ken Greenberg, Toronto Urbanist

Stream A – Placemaking: Ted Relph could be offered the key role

Stream B – Development: A senior developer could be offered the key role

Wrap-Up – Kristyn Wong-Tam, Councillor for Ward 27

The Great Yonge Street Goal

Yonge Street has a long and glorious history. It was the first street of Upper Canada. By the end of the 19th century, it was *the* commercial street in Toronto. Today, many see it as the “main street” of Toronto. It's the way people get around downtown. Its connections to adjacent neighbourhoods support the open, diverse, and inviting nature of those neighbourhoods.

But Yonge Street is somewhat tired and tacky. It has more than its share of instant cash shops, tattoo parlors, and fast food outlets. There are only a limited number of good restaurants, at least not on the stretch between College and Bloor. It takes pedestrians from one point to another, but it's not the kind of street where people window shop or just stroll on a weekend. It is an effective pedestrian corridor, but it's far from a great street.

A significant infusion of money would be required to turn Yonge Street around. Developers, especially condo developers, have the money. But too much of what is being proposed by developers would lead to a further deterioration. New buildings would loom over the street, presenting an uninviting front to the pedestrian. It's all too easy to see the street becoming a glass and concrete canyon that invites people to walk elsewhere.

We need to strike a balance. Give the developers the profit they need, but in exchange require the kind of investments that move Yonge Street towards becoming one of the world's great streets. Make it the downtown destination that draws people to stroll, window shop, pause for a coffee or enjoy a meal. Punctuate the street and its immediate environment with memorable places.

A start has been made on Yonge Street between Dundas and Gerrard. Dundas Square is becoming a real place. The Yonge Street entrance to Ryerson will become another place, with the new Student Centre heralding that entrance way. Yonge between Gerrard and College is in its way moving to become a memorable long block. The 75 storey Aura will punctuate the southern end, with the historic College Park providing a meaningful northern extension.

The critical challenge is Yonge from College to Bloor. On the west side of Yonge Street there's a gaggle of new tall condos going up, or planned. Fortunately, none of those new buildings have destroyed the inviting, human scale found with the historic 19th century stores. One of the proposed buildings on the east side of the street respects the form and shape of historic Yonge Street. But respect for context is not guaranteed from all developers.

The City has launched a development process that will produce a Planning Framework for this stretch of Yonge Street. Let us take as our goal that all new development on or near Yonge Street contribute towards making this a great street. Let it be human scale.

Let it be walkable. Let it respect history. Let it retain and enhance visual variety. Let resources be devoted to making the linear parks meaningful places. Encourage the full commercial and pedestrian use of the laneways that separate Yonge Street lots from the linear parks.

We need to be tough minded, but fair. The developers need density to make the profits their businesses demand. But that density must not be allowed to weaken our great street aspiration. Make a contribution towards that goal a condition for approval. Insensitive density that doesn't respect the context or our great street aspiration should not be allowed. Yonge Street can be turned around. It can become one of the world's great streets.

World-Class Great Streets

Different observers come to different conclusions about what makes a world-class great street. There are, however, features that many would point out as common to most great streets. Allan Jacobs in his *Great Streets*, (1993), provides a detailed examination of great streets of the world.

I. Historical & Social Presence

Most great streets have a storied past. They're notable for what they have been, and for what they are. They are also notable for their presence in the public mind. People recognize great streets as “important”.

II. The Social & Built Reality

1. It's possible to walk with leisure. People are present in sufficient numbers for safety, but with enough space that you can walk at your own pace.
2. The street “walls” have been well-defined. Buildings don't loom over the street, but they do provide a consistent definition.
3. The street engages the eye. There is a rich variety of textures, patterns, and shapes along the street. Many store fronts are relatively narrow.
4. The design of buildings is complementary. The buildings along the street “work” with each other, but they need not be copies of each other.
5. Construction materials are generally of high quality. The buildings show that care was taken to use good quality materials.
6. There is a substantial “green” presence along the street and at the entrance of side streets. Trees, plantings, and hanging baskets are used.
7. There is a rich retail and recreational diversity. There are different kinds of shops and different kinds of recreation available along and adjacent to the street.
8. The street features great “details”. It might be a great door, or a great window, or a great bench. Great features stand out.
9. There are recognized “places” along the street and adjacent to the street. These

places are destinations and locations where you want to spend time.

Yonge Street has the requisite historical and social presence. Its built form may have been somewhat neglected, with some inappropriate newer buildings, but the street's "bones" are good. It could and should be revitalized. And the adjacent laneways provide a rich opportunity for alternative retail presence. As an early step, the vehicular street needs to be put on a diet. And the price for new construction on or near Yonge Street should include a significant contribution towards the goal of making this a world-class great street. We can make it happen.

Robert Fabian
robert@fabian.ca