

**To: Mayor Ford
Planning and Growth Committee
City Manager**

Re: PG7.1 Core Service Review

July 27, 2011

Good morning. My name is Michelle and I live and work in Ward 20. I am here today on behalf of the 14,000 members of the Graduate Students' Union (GSU) at the University of Toronto, as the Civics and Environment Commissioner, and on behalf of the Toronto Coalition for Active Transportation (TCAT), as the Chair of the Steering Committee.

Both the Graduate Students' Union and TCAT are extremely concerned over KPMG's report with regards to the Public Realm Section. KPMG highlight a potential savings by "consider[ing] reducing the service levels and/or eliminating the Public Realm Improvement program" (p. 5).

KPMG notes, on page 14, that the Public Realm Improvements is an "optional service to improve the look of public places in the City". With even a small effort of research into the mandate of the Public Realm Section, one can easily find that it is far more than the "look" of public spaces in Toronto.

The Public Realm Section is tasked with many responsibilities, including managing the City's Coordinated Street Furniture Program, managing the City's sidewalks and pedestrian spaces, increasing safety, and implementing the Toronto Walking Strategy, recently adopted by City Council in 2009. The Strategy aims to build a physical and cultural environment that supports and encourages walking, including vibrant streets, parks, public squares and neighbourhoods where people will choose to walk more often.

Since its establishment, the Public Realm office has never been fully staffed. Therefore, the GSU and TCAT advocate for an expansion of investment in the Public Realm Section, not a reduction or elimination. Furthermore, the Public Realm Section is unique from other City programs in that staffing costs are from advertising revenue from the Coordinated Street Furniture Program contract with Astral Media, not property taxes.

The Public Realm Section works with local Business Improvement Areas, by offering financial incentives, such as cost sharing, for BIAs to improve and revitalise public space. According to a City Staff person at a Core Services Review Public Consultation that I attended, the City benefits from these cost-sharing measures by at

least \$6 million net, as the BIAs not only purchase benches, flower pots, flowers and more, but also maintain the infrastructure on behalf of both the BIA and the City.

There are three main incentives, among many, for Toronto to invest in the public realm and pedestrian infrastructure: benefits to the local economy, reduction in congestion, and safety for all road users.

According to a TCAT study from 2008 and 2010, active transportation, including walking, benefits local businesses in Toronto. The studies indicate that patrons who arrive to Bloor Street, in the Annex and in Bloor West Village, by foot (and transit and bicycle) spend more per visit and visit more often than those who arrive by car. Therefore, an investment in pedestrian infrastructure is clearly an investment in Toronto's local economy.

Another benefit of investing in the pedestrian realm is the direct impact it has on reducing congestion. The cost of congestion to the GTA is over \$2.2 billion annually. By investing in pedestrian infrastructure, the City creates more incentives to commute by foot, and thus helps alleviate congestion.

The Public Realm Section also works to improve safety conditions for pedestrians on our roads, by installing zebra striped pedestrian crossings, pedestrian priority scramble phases, pedestrian countdown signals and pedestrian safety media campaigns. These measures are extremely important to the safety of our citizens, as pedestrians are by far the most vulnerable road user. According to the Toronto Pedestrian Collision Summary from 2009, there were 13, 326 pedestrian collisions from 2004 to 2009. That makes an average of 2, 221 collisions every year. To ignore these numbers and reduce investment in pedestrian infrastructure and safety is simply unacceptable.

There are, of course, many other benefits that the City receives from investing in the public realm. Walkable cities are known to promote tourism; again, this contributes to Toronto's local economy. Increasing the public realm often means an increase in green spaces. As was evident from the 100+ deputations made at last week's Parks and Environment Committee, it is clear that the citizens of Toronto value their green spaces. Building a walkable city is also building an age-friendly city, which is extremely important with our aging population. And lastly, walkable cities are more accessible to those with physical disabilities or impairments.

In closing, we, the GSU and TCAT, recommend that the Planning and Growth Committee direct the Executive Committee to preserve the projects and programs of the Public Realm Section.

The Public Realm Section contributes to a more walkable Toronto, which means a Toronto with more support to local businesses, more safety for the most vulnerable

road users, more tourism, more green spaces, more vibrant, more age-friendly and accessible, and a Toronto with less congestion, less sedentary-lifestyle caused diseases, less pollution. In short, a better Toronto for us all to live, work and play.

On behalf of the Graduate Students' Union at the University of Toronto, and the Toronto Coalition for Active Transportation, I thank you for taking the time to listen to my deputation today.

Michelle St-Amour

Civics and Environment Commissioner,
Graduate Students' Union
University of Toronto
civics@utgsu.ca

Chair,
Steering Committee
Toronto Coalition for Active Transportation
michelle.stamour@gmail.com