

Multidisciplinary Urban Capstone Project

Canadian Urban Institute

Pandemic Impact on Main Street: Downtown Yonge

Final Report

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Executive Summary

Our project with the Canadian Urban Institute (CUI) closely studies how Downtown (DT) Yonge as a main street has been affected by the pandemic. One method we used to achieve this was through evaluating the existing state of civic infrastructure. This framework provides significant insights because, as highlighted in CUI's project initiative, civic infrastructures are unique sites on main streets that promote community-engaged spaces and enhances the vitality of the public realm. Ultimately, the civic infrastructures on DT Yonge activates the main street as a placemaking site and is integral to the street's identity, diversity and vibrancy. Thus, studying these sites can help inform us what interventions contribute to the main street's resilience and recovery post-pandemic. Our research questions can be summarized as:

- 1. How has DT Yonge transformed post-pandemic and what are their changing priorities/demands?*
 - a. What existing civic infrastructure has had the greatest contribution to the recovery of the DT Yonge post-pandemic?*
 - b. What interventions can further build resilience and long-term equity to support the vitality of the main street?*

From these findings, our goal was to design a holistic intervention that tackled the transformative changes we identified from our analyses. Through these proposed interventions, we hope to reimagine DT Yonge's main street as a space that is reflective of the diverse and changing demands of its users. This report will first outline the preliminary qualitative and quantitative research we conducted with both primary and secondary data, literature reviews and interviews with relevant stakeholders (CUI members, DT Yonge BIA members, and users of streets such as students and local/chain businesses). Through this mixed methods research approach, we identified three ways that the current civic infrastructure does not reflect the demands of the changing main street: a change in the street's typical mobility patterns that indicate it is becoming more 'locally based'; a significant lack of pedestrian streetscapes and corridors due to its car-centric streets that do not accommodate for the increasing population and heavy pedestrian flow; and safety and inclusion issues that exacerbate crime cases and can be connected with the high storefront vacancy rates found in the Yonge-Dundas intersection.

These findings present opportunities to improve existing civic infrastructure. Our theory of change examines the connections between civic infrastructure, main streets, and placemaking/programming to understand how we can create effective and equity-focused changes. Thus, we developed a three-pronged approach that combines programmatic, physical, and municipal based changes that work in tandem to create and maintain the physical and social infrastructure needed to support the vitality of DT Yonge. Moreover, the role of municipal investments and policies in our approach works to address systemic issues of the safety and inclusivity of civic infrastructures. Throughout our design process, we emphasized an equity-focused assessment to ensure we consider which specific marginalized populations our interventions will serve, and build resilience for.

Our design intervention went through different iterations. We drew up perspective, isometric and plan-section drawings to visualize and highlight the changes we were proposing. Through these interventions, we hope to address the social, physical, cultural and economic transformative demands of the changing main street. Our report will conclude with evaluating our intervention and a discussion of future next steps CUI can take with our work to continue studying the pandemic impact of DT Yonge and ways forward to build and maintain resiliency on the dynamic main street.

I. Introduction

Main streets are significant sites that indicate urban vitality, community connectivity, and social and cultural activity. To phrase it simply, “*Main streets are like the spine of every vital urban center*” (Mary Rowe, as quoted in Canadian Urban Institute, 2020). They reflect the unique character and identity of the diverse communities who utilize the space for different uses. Moreover, they are hubs of economic activity, especially a main street such as DT Yonge, they hold employment opportunities, retail and tourist destinations, office spaces and more. Successful main streets translate to stable and flourishing local economies (Bring Back Main Street, 2020). More importantly, main streets contribute to the resiliency and well-being of a community through its role as a gathering place and a site for social interaction and civic participation. This is particularly important post-pandemic as the industries that make up main streets, such as food services, retail trade, and arts and entertainment, were greatly impacted by

the pandemic, some on the verge of closing, and some permanently closed. This presents transformative opportunities for holistic and creative urban solutions to reimagine our main streets post-pandemic. In light of this, Canadian Urban Institute's (CUI) project on Pandemic Impact on Main Street is a research effort in studying how main streets are impacted by the pandemic in order to understand what the effective solutions to recovery and resiliency are for main streets.

II. Definition of the Problem

DT Yonge is an essential part of Toronto's identity due to its central role in the city's overall diverse cultural landscape, transportation network, and economic development. It has one of the highest volumes of foot traffic in the city, and there are three TTC stations running through the Business Improvement Area (BUA) - College, Dundas and Queen Station (TABIA, 2021). It is densely populated with mixed retail stores and offices that include the Eaton Center, as well as historic buildings such as Massey Hall and the Elgin & Winter Garden Theater, and is also where Toronto Metropolitan University resides (TABIA, 2021). There are many hotspots in the area that include Yonge-Dundas Square that frequently hosts festivals, and is also a civic site where many protests occur. As we will further expand below, these existing civic infrastructures contribute to the historical and civic significance of the street and enhances the vitality of the public realm. However, due to the impacts of COVID-19, DT Yonge has experienced problems that have halted its urban life and local community endurance, changing the priorities of the street. In addition to a significant decrease in visitors, the main street has experienced dramatic changes to its diverse users and uses, and our study has identified that current aging infrastructures have had difficulty meeting those

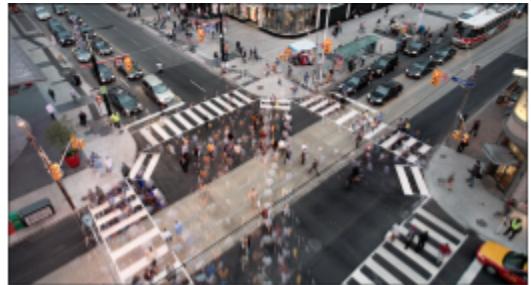
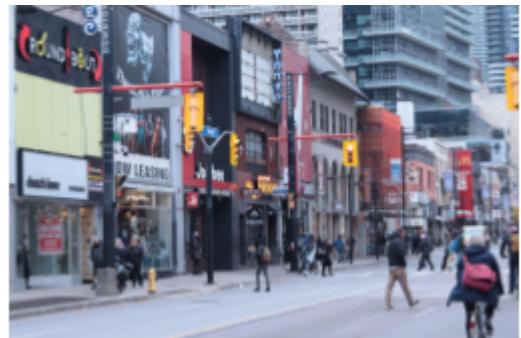


Image of Yonge St & Dundas St W Intersection - 'Pedestrian Scramble' (Eddie, 2012)



Photo of Yonge-Dundas Square: a venue where festivals and activities are hosted that attract many visitors



Street view of DT Yonge: mix of retail stores with pedestrians and cyclists

transformative demands. Thus, our research examining how DT Yonge has changed post-pandemic, and our recommendations of design interventions, will help make informed decisions and cases for additional public infrastructure investment that can further build and support the main streets' vitality, resiliency, economic diversity and social equity/inclusion.

III. Methodology

Our design interventions drew from the mixed methods research we conducted to analyze and understand the needs, and pain points of DT Yonge. Our preliminary research began by interviewing key stakeholders such as local businesses, students from TMU, the DT Yonge BIA, and CUI members to gauge varying perspectives of how the pandemic has affected those individuals and their use of DT Yonge. The primary research we conducted consists of corridor and intersection observations to investigate traffic and street characteristics, business types and storefront vacancies. Moreover, our secondary research included a contemporary analysis of the area that included previous pedestrianization case studies, existing assessments, investment policies, and strategies; and analyzing mobility data and patterns from Environics Analytics of the area. From then, we designed initial drafts of our interventions and these were evaluated from a pugh analysis, design alternative decision matrix and feedback from relevant stakeholders. We then adjusted our interventions based on those insights, as well as studying other case studies similar to our intervention and our focused spatial scale to deepen our understanding.

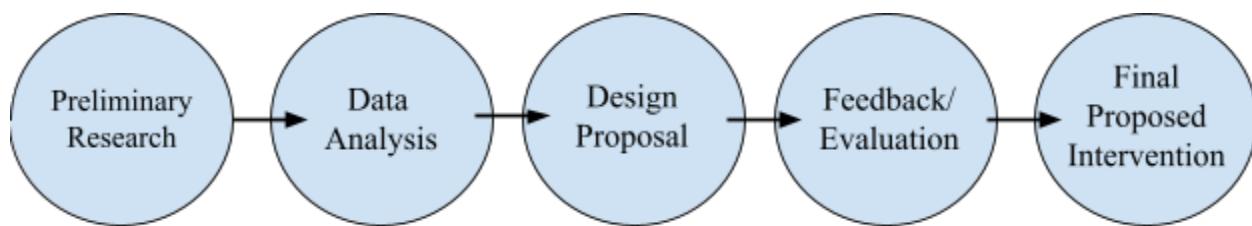


Figure. flow chart of stages of research

A major constraint to our study is the short timeline for a large-scale main street. In ideal conditions, after suggesting design interventions, it would advance to the project testing phase where we can refine the quality and detail of the interventions. In addition, we are a four-person student team, and so we may not be able to conduct thorough engagement with all the stakeholders, and have to consider the interviews are not representative of every user of the

street. Our team members have backgrounds in architecture, computer science, urban planning and design, and while it is already diverse, it means we may be missing perspectives or skills from other disciplines that can provide more insight. Commuting is another constraint that can limit how much on-site research we are able to do, as all of us have to take time to commute to the main street. Moreover, safety is another constraint that may affect the results of our research. Our team feels safe conducting on-site research during daytime only, but perhaps nighttime produces different results (due to nightlife) and we would be excluding that in the study. Lastly, DT Yonge is a dynamic street with a rich history, and it is difficult for our small team to cover its diversity in its entirety.

IV. Preliminary Research

A. History of the Area

Yonge Street is historically notable as the longest and one of the oldest streets in Canada. It began as a primary dirt road for Indigenous communities which led down to the harbour. In the 1790's, it was named after the British Secretary of War, Sir George Yonge. During early settlement, Yonge Street was a main travel route for farmers and craftsmen to the City of York until the 1890's, when an early form of the bus and streetcar developed, and later the first adaptation of the subway in 1954 (Heritage Conservation District Plan, 2016). Yonge Street has gone through copious amounts of change over the past few decades.

In recent history, Toronto is often recognized for its Yonge and Dundas Square, which was projected in the 1990s and built in 2003 (Heritage Toronto, 2016). This space was designed to be a public square for social leisure and activity, which included a plan for entertainment spaces and outdoor seating. This space is the most lively part of Toronto as it connects to the Eaton Centre, TTC's Line 1, and Toronto Metropolitan University (formerly known as Ryerson University), which has contributed to the cultural growth of Yonge Street since 1948. Many commercial enterprises have replaced historic infrastructures throughout Yonge and Dundas to inhabit a similar atmosphere as Times Square, New York City (Heritage Toronto, 2016).

B. General Contemporary Analysis

Looking at the Downtown Yonge BIA report (DYBIA, 2022), the pedestrian traffic count on Yonge Street has been steadily rising since 2021. In March 2022, the pedestrian traffic count

was raised to around 4,300,000, which nearly doubled compared to March 2021. Looking at the figure below, the pre-COVID count was estimated at 6,300,000, and we are seeing a steady increase over the years post-pandemic.

According to the Pedestrian and Vehicle Report (DYBIA, 2022) from Downtown Yonge BIA in September 2022, 83.7% of the traffic are pedestrians and only 16.3% are vehicles. However, the report notes that only 25% of the space is for pedestrians. The space is dominantly car-centric despite the large volume of pedestrians.

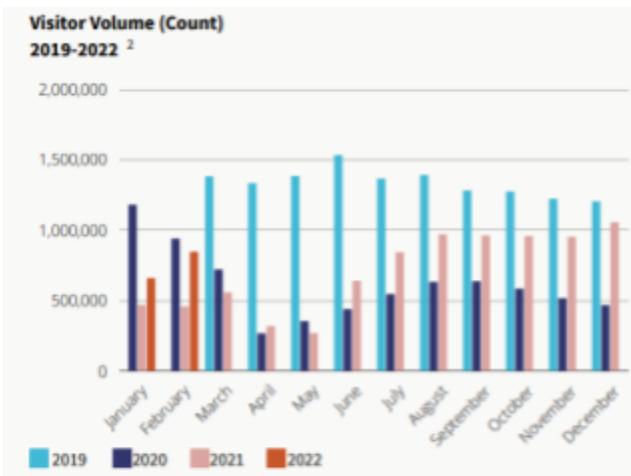


Table. Visitor Volume from 2019-2022 (DYBIA, 2022)

As for the retail sector, Downtown Yonge has a diverse retail mix with food services being the dominant sector at 31.6% (DYBIA, 2021). Nearly 80% of businesses are small, non-leading retailers according to the annual report (DYBIA, 2021). The pandemic has seen an increase in retail vacancy, but it has seen a steady improvement in the last year now sitting at a total vacancy of 13.6% (DYBIA, 2021). From these initial examinations, there are specific factors that contribute to the resiliency of the street, and there are opportunities to further support its resiliency.

C. Demographic Composition

It is difficult to find the demographics specific to the boundaries of the DT Yonge BIA, so we studied the Church-Yonge's neighbourhood profile, as our BIA is included in it. Moreover, the data we are using is outdated from 2016, and there have been adjustments to the regional boundaries that may not represent the current demographic composition of DT Yonge today.

The bustling street is the second-largest population in Toronto's downtown core in 2011. The number of renters living here is 74%, significantly greater than the city's average of 45.4% (CUI, 2016). More than 30% are between 25 and 34 years old, and over 60 percent of its residents are single-person households compared to the city's average at 31.6% (CUI, 2016).

However, it is interesting that the area also has the most significant number of unemployed population in the core at 9.3% (CUI, 2016).

Additionally, the average household income is significantly lower than the city average at \$60,200, but we note that this may not represent the reality as this data includes Church Street (CUI, 2016). However, what still remains relatively the same is the high number of households spending more than 30% of their income on housing costs. More than 45% of households do so, which is 10% more than the city average, indicating how costly renting is in the area (CUI, 2016).

Looking closely at the immigration breakdown, we find that recent immigrants come from India, the Philippines and China, and there is a high percentage of residents who are non-permanent residents in the area (CUI, 2016). The area is filled with diversity, and there are many sites of civic infrastructure that promote it.

D. Interview Findings

Stakeholder	Interviewee
Canadian Urban Institute (CUI)	Greg Spencer, Director of Policy and Research
Toronto Metropolitan University (TMU)	Three Undergraduate Students
Local Business Retailers	Planet Fitness and Nails on Yonge
Downtown Yonge Business Improvement Area (BIA)	Pauline Larsen, Executing Director and Chief Operating Officer

To better understand operations and personal experiences with Downtown Yonge, we interviewed three stakeholders: Canadian Urban Institute (CUI), Downtown Yonge BIA, Toronto Metropolitan University (TMU) Students, and Local Business Retailers. We asked each stakeholder a series of specifically curated questions and probed accordingly (See appendix B).

One of the key takeaways from our interview with Greg Spencer, Director of Policy and Research at CUI, is understanding that main streets are constantly changing, especially in this post-pandemic era. Greg provided insight that with the locally-based transformation Downtown Yonge is experiencing, there should be more permanent placemaking activities through

streetscape and physical infrastructure and guidelines for design principles that promote narrow storefronts. Following, we spoke to three different TMU students, who expressed a major concern for the lack of safety measures on campus. There is a specific emphasis from student's about regaining a specific identity of the main street and having this coincide with the University's grassroots. Our interviews point towards a need for greater connectivity between TMU students and Downtown Yonge. Additionally, through conversing with Local Business Retailers at Nails on Yonge and Planet Fitness, they stated that it was a much quieter time. As Yonge street returned back to normal, they noticed a dramatic increase in the homeless populations throughout Downtown Yonge. Employee's from both Yonge street businesses stated they would like to see more effort put into making the urban street more friendly and connected to the general public. Lastly, we met with Pauline Larsen, Executing Director and Chief Operating Officer of the DT Yonge BIA who provided insightful information about the transformation of the main street. She demonstrates that post pandemic Downtown Yonge has changed the demands of the street, curating a more hyper localized community, with only 30% of pedestrians being visitors. This has also led to an increase in vacancies. Pauline demonstrates that one of the great strengths of DT Yonge is that it is reflective of a whole microcosm of Toronto.

V. Intervention Hypotheses

A. Discussion of Existing Civic Infrastructure

DT Yonge as a main street comprises various types of civic infrastructure. Drawing from our preliminary research and interview findings, there are three types; prominent sites that are hotspot areas such as Yonge-Dundas Square, Toronto Metropolitan University Student Learning Centre, and the Eaton Centre. These civic sites activate the street by promoting temporary placemaking activities that support the vibrancy of the street, as well as attracting many visitors from diverse backgrounds and neighbourhoods to one spot. The civic infrastructure in this case provides a gathering space for placemaking events that not only increases foot traffic of the area, but also changes the demographics by attracting visitors from



Placemaking events on Yonge-Dundas Square
(BlogTO, 2022)

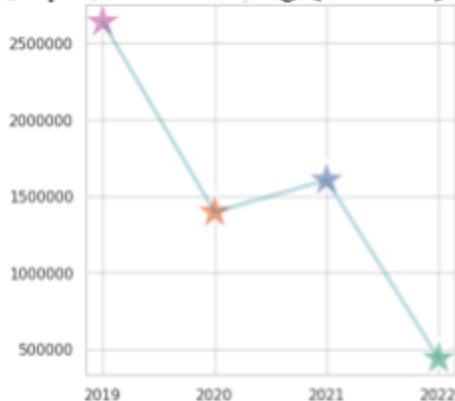
diverse backgrounds and neighbourhoods. Examples include Indonesian Food Festival bazaar at Yonge-Dundas Square and Nuit Blanche along Yonge Street. Some of these placemaking events also alter the typical mobility patterns with many of these visitors coming from cities outside the Greater Toronto Hamilton Area. We hypothesize that these placemaking/programming are integral to the street's diversity and vibrancy, and this is a point of focus that needs to be supported and developed further.

We also hypothesize that other less prominent civic infrastructure helped shape DT Yonge's identity as a culture corridor. This includes the clusters of music, theaters, and art buildings such as Mirvish, Elgin and Winter, Massey Hall, and the Music Mural, sites that have also been referenced in our interview findings. Understanding main streets as cultural corridors can help us understand how they function as sites that preserve and promote local arts and culture. This cultivates social inclusion and community belonging which is critical to the success of main streets post-pandemic, as the pandemic has been characterized by a sense of desolation. Our last hypothesis looks at how smaller civic infrastructure such as safe injection sites work to serve vulnerable populations in the area and contribute to the community well being of main street. All these different types of civic infrastructure and placemaking activities contribute to the social vitality, safety and inclusivity of DT Yonge, all of which has been integral to building resilience. The findings below demonstrate ways that current infrastructure do not reflect the demands of the changing main street, and the opportunity it presents to improve:

1. Is DT Yonge becoming more “locally-based”?

The graphs below are data from Environics Analytics. This data reinforces CUI's findings that the pandemic has seen a change in DT Yonge's typical mobility patterns. The median distance graph shows that pre-pandemic, DT Yonge saw visitors coming from as far as 16km. However, this has drastically decreased post-pandemic and is not recovering to original levels present day. The unique visitors graph shows that the number of unique visitors has taken a plunge after 2019 of a significant 71% decrease. Unique visitors is a useful indicator of the actual size of visitors in DT Yonge.

Unique Visitors to DT Yonge (2019-2022)



Median Distance Visitors Travelled From

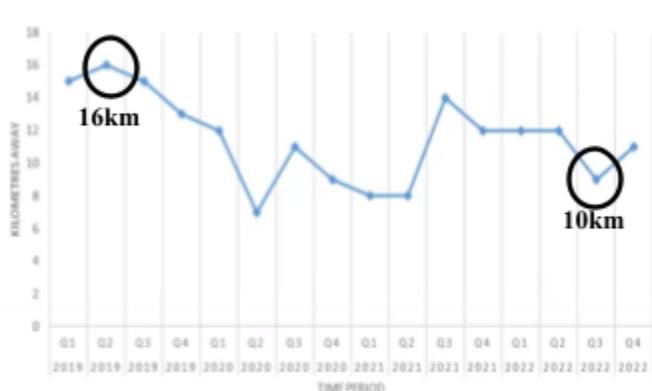
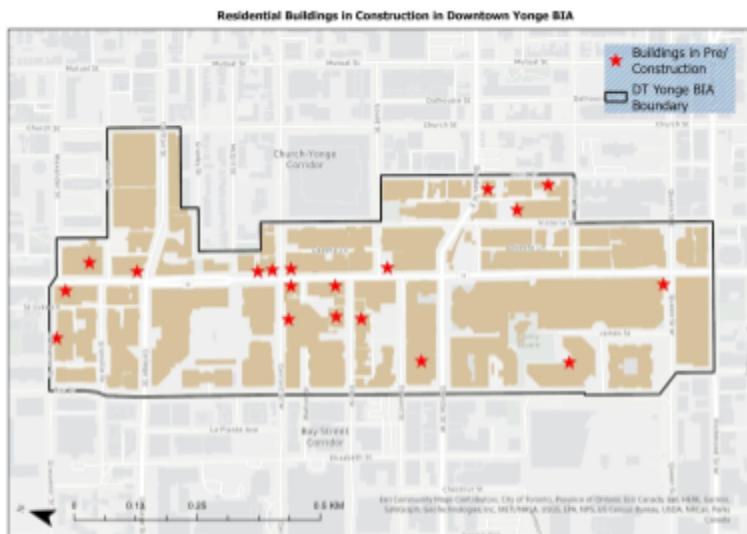


Figure. Data from: Environics Analytics (2022)

When we compare this declining trend of visitors who travel from far distances, to the statistic that there has been a 15.5% increase in population between 2016 and 2021 (StatsCan, 2022), we can hypothesize that the makeup of users who frequent the main street has increased significantly to the local residents there and thus typical mobility patterns are coming locally. Moreover, as evident with the number of residential buildings in construction (see map below), there will be an influx of new residents that add to these mobility patterns.

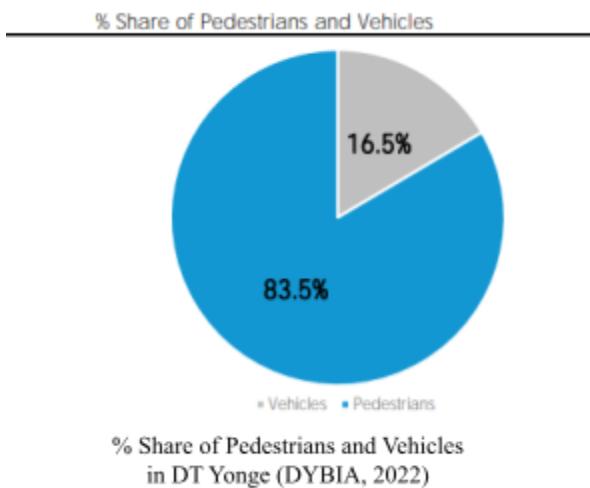


Map of Residential Buildings in Construction in DT Yonge

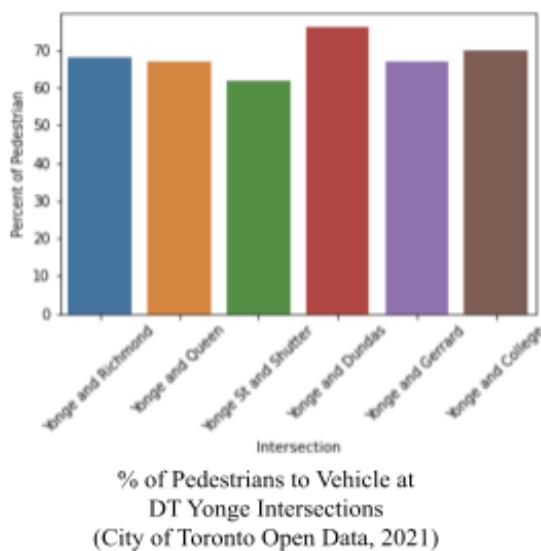
When we design our interventions we need to keep in mind how to balance the tension between these local transformations and DT Yonge as still a popular retail and tourist attraction. Thus our interventions will work towards this balancing between locality that supports the microcosm of the local community that resides

here, with the commercial grandness of the street.

2. Current car-centric streets



The figure above is from DYBIA's (2022) latest report, which found that despite 83.5% of traffic make-up being pedestrians, only 25% of that space is for pedestrians. The



A radical pedestrianization of the main street would be a tempting idea, but after discussing with stakeholders, there are equity implications of those. Emergency service

discrepancy in those numbers point to the main street being dominantly car-centric despite the large volume of pedestrians.

In the context of civic infrastructure and our hypothesis of DT Yonge's influx of residents, this is an issue because when we analyze where the hotspots of pedestrians to vehicle ratio are (see bar graph below), the Yonge and Dundas intersection has the highest volume at 76% (City of Toronto Open Data, 2021).

Moreover, drawing from the Toronto Police (2021) data, the intersection also has one of the highest rates of car collisions along DT Yonge. Two prominent civic infrastructure that we have identified from our research sit along this intersection: Yonge-Dundas Square and Eaton Centre. Thus there is an opportunity to improve the safety of the street through pedestrianizing it. A push for pedestrianization also promotes more placemaking activities for the surrounding civic infrastructure because of the additional public space.

vehicles, families with young children who find it easier to drive in a vehicle, individuals who live far distances but drive to DT Yonge

are some of those groups that deserve road space. Thus, our intervention will reallocate pedestrian space on DT Yonge by looking at other physical infrastructure interventions such as focusing on secondary streets.

3. Connection between safety & inclusion and storefront vacancies & business types

More than half of the businesses (55.2%) in Downtown Yonge are retail stores. From our preliminary observation, the majority of those retail stores are chains, such as Shoppers Drug Mart, McDonalds, Tim Hortons, Adidas, etc. Eaton Centre, a large shopping center, works as a civic infrastructure because it is a very diverse space that attracts many consumers. However, the average shopper household income at the Eaton Centre, according to Cadillac Fairview (2017) is \$118,454 and we have found from CensusMapper (2021) that the household income in 2021 is \$65,500. The discrepancies in numbers suggests that despite shopping malls being a civic site that promotes mixing amongst the community, there are still excluded populations who do not benefit from the infrastructure. Thus, there can be improvements in Eaton Centre's civic infrastructure by designing interventions that cultivate social inclusion.

Whilst pedestrianizing the intersection outside of Eaton Centre will improve inclusion by increasing accessibility and walkability of the area, another way is through municipal investments and policies on developing narrow storefronts. We will expand on this more below. The idea draws from Greg's comments that these spaces are more inviting than monolithic buildings such as the Eaton center. It is less commercialized and would add diversity to the predominantly chain retail make up of DT Yonge businesses. The development of narrow storefronts can mean more locally-based stores that cater to the transformative local demands we hypothesized earlier. In this way, as these storefronts encourage idling, inclusivity and interaction, they become new potential civic infrastructure sites. Moreover, they can contribute to the identity of a street, which is integral to resiliency. These points address the concerns from our TMU interviews that voiced how commercialized DT Yonge is despite its rich history.

B. Conceptual Framework - Theory of Change

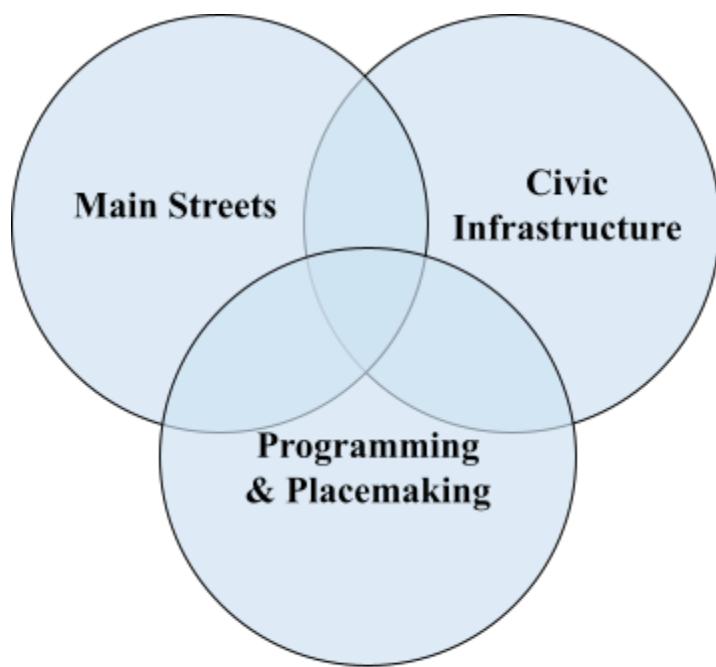


Figure. Conceptual framework of study

From the findings above, our interventions will operate within the intersection of these three domains: main streets, civic infrastructure, programming and placemaking. This holistic approach will address the traffic and safety concerns, as well as community connectivity and wellbeing. They will work together to create the physical and social infrastructure necessary for building resilience. Our interventions are motivated by creating more permanent impacts from current placemaking activities. We will do this by

proposing physical hard infrastructure improvements that will transform the civic infrastructure on the main street to attract more diverse communities to come to these spaces and make it easily accessible. Within these proposed changes on the civic infrastructure, we will create community-focused programming and placemaking that tackles those transformative local demands. In this way, we differ from yongeTOmorrow's initiative as our interventions attempts to support and preserve the locality and changes we are seeing. Moreover, the municipal investments we push for include a cross-sectoral collaboration between local outreach teams, social agencies, local hospitals, mental health hospitals and police forces.

Our theory of change attempts to reallocate main street space through a focus on secondary streets all throughout Yonge St. These spaces provide opportunities for more gathering spaces for pedestrians, cyclists and local businesses. Post-pandemic, these are important spaces to the community-well being and mental health of individuals as it facilitates engagement and interaction. The combination of physical, program and municipal changes allow for more

placemaking activities to have more effective and lasting impacts on the community by promoting social vitality, safety and equitable neighbourhoods.

VI. Proposed Methodologies

A. Store Vacancies

Sub-region	Store Vacancy Count	Crime Cases Count
College-Bay	2	7
College-Yonge	1	17
Gerrard-Bay	4	5
Gerrard-Yonge	6	20
Dundas-Bay	1	9
Dundas-Yonge	11	48
Queen-Bay	1	14
Queen-Yonge	1	14

The table represents the number of store vacancies and crime cases in eight different sub-regions in our area of interest, where each sub-region is defined by two intersecting streets and the corresponding side of the street (Bay or Yonge).

The number of store vacancies ranges from 1 to 11, with the highest number of vacancies being in the Dundas-Yonge sub-region, and the lowest number of vacancies being in the Queen-Bay, Queen-Yonge, and College-Yonge sub-regions. The number of crime cases ranges from 5 to 48, with the highest number of crime cases being in the Dundas-Yonge sub-region, and the lowest number of crime cases being in the Gerrard-Bay sub-region. Overall, there is a

correlation between store vacancies and crime rates in some areas, as the sub-regions with higher vacancy counts tend to have higher crime rates.

This data can be relevant to our proposal of pedestrianizing the area. In the context of the data provided, pedestrianization could potentially be a solution to address some of the issues present in the sub-regions with high crime rates and/or high store vacancies. Pedestrianization can encourage more people to visit the area, which can in turn support local businesses and potentially reduce the number of store vacancies. Furthermore, creating pedestrian-only zones may also help reduce crime rates in certain areas. Pedestrianization can make it more difficult for criminals to commit certain types of crimes. Additionally, the increased visitors in the area can make it easier for people to notice suspicious behaviour and report it to authorities. Therefore, pedestrianization could potentially be an effective solution to address the high crime rates and store vacancies problems in Downtown Yonge.

B. Accidents Involving Pedestrians and Cyclists



Map of Injuries and Fatalities involving Pedestrians and Cyclists

This map provides an overview of the hotspots of pedestrian and cyclist fatalities/serious injuries in Downtown Yonge from 2008 to 2022. Overall, the map indicates that pedestrian and cyclist safety is a concern in Downtown Yonge. There were multiple incidents of pedestrian fatalities and serious injuries, as well as incidents of serious injuries involving cyclists.

The map has different markers depending on the accident type: "Fatality pedestrian", "Seriously Injured pedestrian", "Seriously Injured cyclist". The corresponding makers are shown in the legend. The table highlights the issue of pedestrian and cyclist safety in the different sub-regions. The number of incidents varies across the different sub-regions, with some sub-regions having more accidents than others.

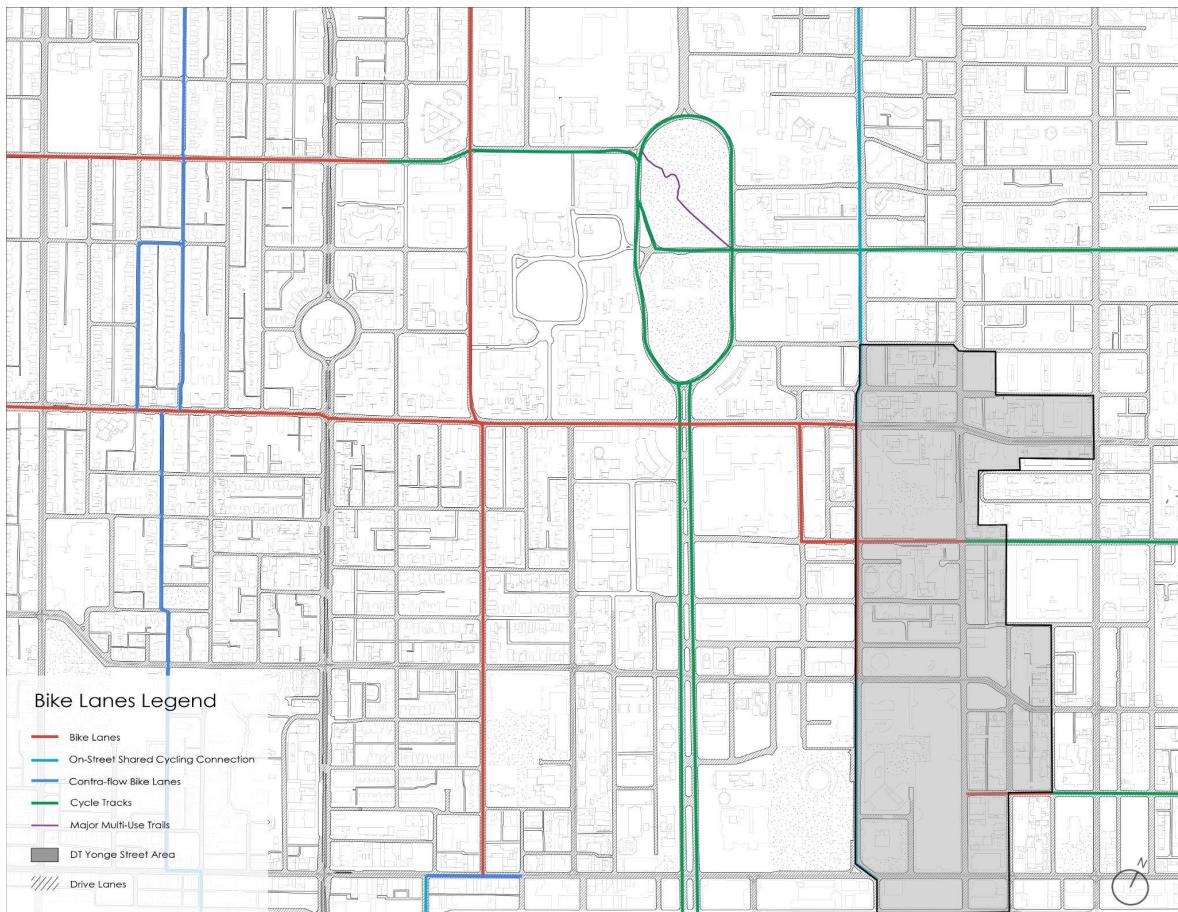
This map helped us shape our plan for pedestrianizing Downtown Yonge. Specifically, adding the crosswalks and bike lanes. Adding crosswalks can make it easier for pedestrians to cross busy streets, while adding bike lanes can provide a designated space for cyclists to travel, reducing the likelihood of collisions with vehicles.

C. Bike Lanes

This map shows that there are several bike lanes in downtown Toronto, including some major routes such as Bloor Street and Richmond/Adelaide. However, there are currently no bike lanes on Yonge Street or its secondary streets. This can present a challenge for cyclists looking to navigate the downtown area safely, as Yonge Street is one of the busiest streets in the city. There is a need for more bike infrastructure in the downtown Toronto area, including on Yonge Street and its secondary streets. By implementing new bike lanes, improving connectivity between existing ones, and ensuring proper maintenance and enforcement, the city can make cycling a safer and more attractive mode of transportation for residents and visitors alike.

A potential suggestion for solving this problem could be to improve connectivity between existing bike lanes in the downtown area. While there are several bike lanes in the downtown core, they are not always connected to each other in a seamless way. Or add more bike lanes in the DT core. Improving connectivity between existing bike lanes would make it easier for cyclists to navigate the city and encourage more people to take up cycling as a mode of transportation. In addition to implementing new bike lanes and improving connectivity between existing ones, it would also be important to ensure that bike lanes are properly maintained and

enforced. This includes regular cleaning and snow clearing in the winter months, as well as enforcement of traffic laws to ensure that motorists respect the rights of cyclists on the road.



Map of existing bike lanes in Toronto

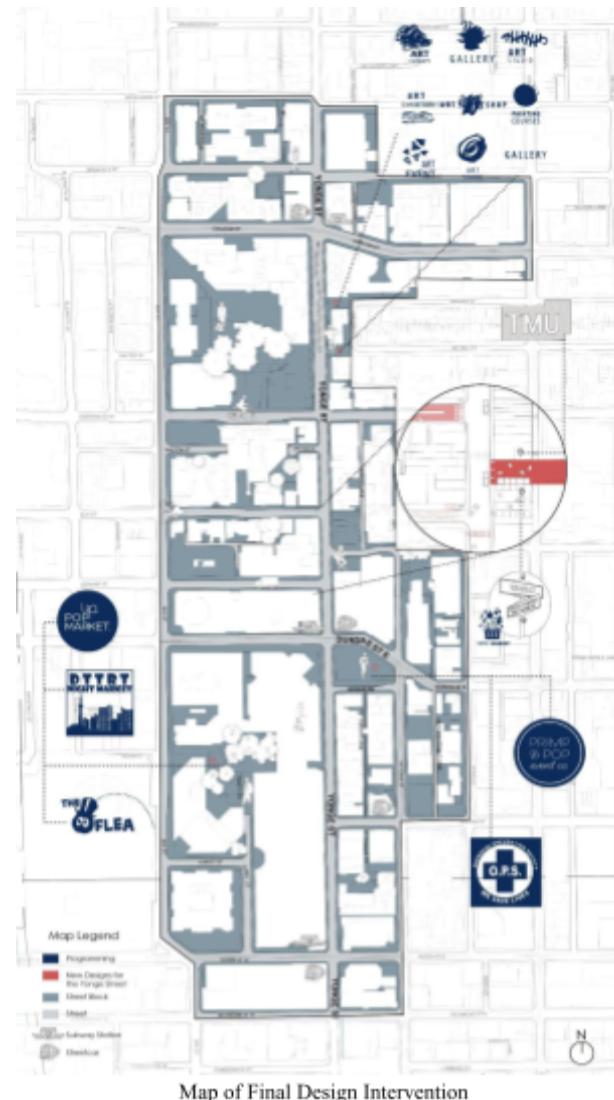
VII. Design Process

A. Design Objectives

Our design interventions are curated to elevate Downtown Yonge's community and amplify its resiliency in a post pandemic era. Our preliminary research led us to the consensus that there is a strong need for permanent and temporary programming, physical design alterations that emphasize pedestrian connectivity, and collaborations with municipal leaders to build direct change. Through our proposed interventions, we are hoping to create durable developments that can reduce traffic, preserve the local flavour, enhance placemaking, and support the diverse volume of users who utilize the main street.

B. Design iterations

Our first physical design focused on a more radical pedestrianized plan that was intended to completely pedestrianize parts of the main street (see Appendix C). As we evaluated this intervention, we recognized the complexities involved with its implementation that includes the significant disruptions it would cause to traffic flow, particularly the right of way for emergency service vehicles. There are equity implications involved as some individuals depend on the road space for their vehicles such as office workers who travel from far distances, families with young children and individuals with disabilities that make it difficult to navigate spaces through walking. Thus, our final design (map below) looks to alleviate the pressures of traffic and pedestrian flow from the main street through a focus on secondary streets. These streets will hold community-focused programming and placemaking that cater to local businesses and artists, diverse cultures and attracting tourists as well. Moreover, there will also be an increase in programming that supports marginalized and vulnerable communities. The map below visualizes where the physical and program based changes would be located in DT Yoonge.



C. Program based

These are interventions that work to support existing permanent civic sites by having events and activities that encourage placemaking activities. These programs are informed by DT Yonge's unique character, existing strengths and resident interests. As we have identified TMU's Student Learning Centre and campus space as a key civic infrastructure to the main street, we

propose that there needs to be engagement and negotiation with the university to open their facilities to the public more. The addition of these spaces provides more opportunities to hold placemaking events. This will immerse the university with DT Yonge more, and improve the resilience of the street by increasing accessibility and inclusivity of those populations that were excluded as a result of the university's "wall mentality".

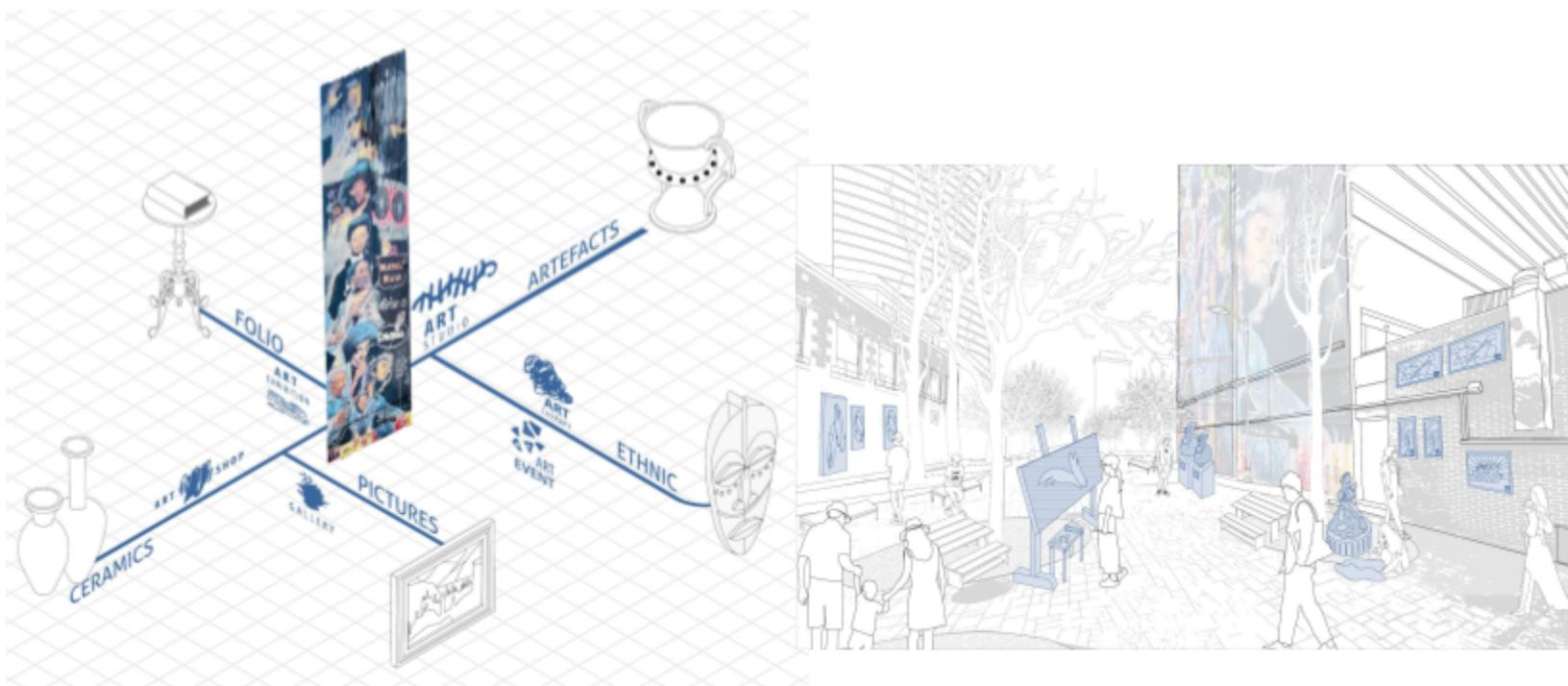
Yonge-Dundas square already has major festivals that work to bring in diverse crowds. However, the program based interventions we propose can be placemaking activities that are smaller scale and tackle community issues such as mental health, homelessness and drug-use. Moreover, there is a need for more community focused programs such as ones promoting local artists to highlight the street's musical history. We will draw from some examples of successful community activatory projects from My Main Street Canada (2021) that looked at events and activations, community improvements and policy and capacity building.

Case Studies	Features
Outdoor Market: Windsor, Ontario	Goods from local vendors sold such as farm-fresh fruits and vegetables. Live entertainment and art activities for children.
Pop Ups: Quinte West, Ontario	Pop-up patios and provided new entrepreneurs to test their products to the community market. A way to get brand recognition before committing to a permanent retail space in the area.
Collingwood Fashion Week	Utilized local or vacant stores, restaurants and outdoors for showcasing fashion and beauty experience found in the downtown's history. Featured local fashion and beauty retailers.
DTK Art Walk: Kitchener, Ontario	Collaborating with building owners, developers and local artists to create outdoor art walks and murals throughout the downtown. Enhanced a sense of community and local cultural development.
Overdose-Prevention Site: Toronto's Moss Park	To combat the increasing opioid-overdose crisis, provided education on overdose prevention, sterile injection supplies, supervision of nurses and other referrals. Safe and hygienic space for vulnerable populations.

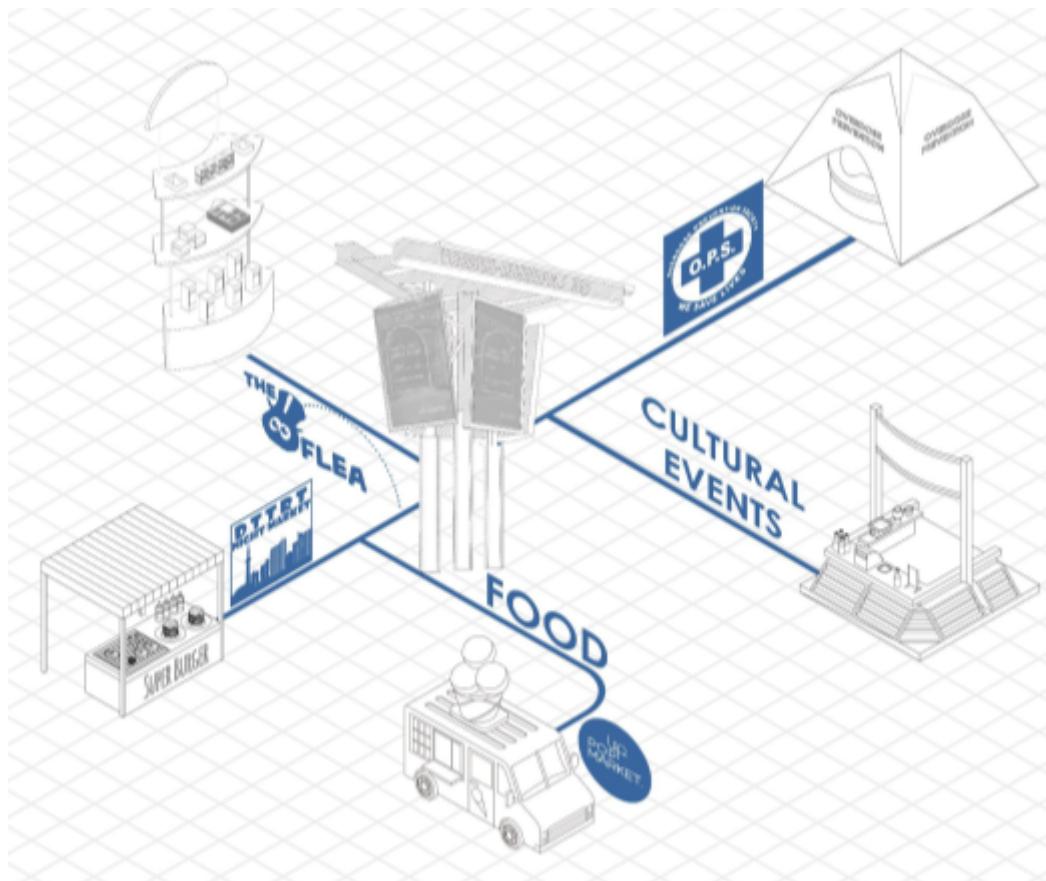
The case studies above showcase the different ways these placemaking activities promote the beautification, sense of community, development of cultural identity, and inclusive safe spaces that meet community needs. We would focus on creating more programming that vulnerable populations depend on such as mental health and drug overdose. Through these program-based interventions, we hope to reimagine a space that is reflective of the diverse and changing demands of its users.



Map highlighting proposed program-based interventions



Music Mural Isometric Drawing of Program Changes



Isometric Drawing of Community Programming at Yonge and Dundas Square
**This could be applied at Trinity Square*

D. Physical design based

From our interviews and conversations with the BIA and CUI stakeholders, there was an encouragement and identified need for stronger community connectivity, particularly for pedestrians as Downtown Yonge recovers post pandemic. The research points towards possible interventions surrounding the physical layout and structure of Downtown Yonge.

The case studies we analyzed, including Stroget, Copenhagen and Pontevedra, Spain showcase successful examples of improving community connectivity through pedestrianization and complete streets. Stroget was transformed into a pedestrian-only district in the 1960s, which led to a significant increase in revenue for local businesses and has become one of the most popular shopping districts in Europe (Global Designing Cities Initiative). Pontevedra, on the other hand, underwent a more recent redesign in 1999 that removed all cars from its streets, leading to a stronger sense of community connection and a significant reduction in air pollution (Hernandez-Morales, 2022).

Our primary and secondary research demonstrates that pedestrianized regions thrive in curating street connectivity. After consulting with additional support, we decided that complete streets and woonerf streets, also known as living streets, were the most feasible and effective solution for Downtown Yonge. The main street acts as an important pathway for many people, organizations, and emergency vehicles. Thus, although pedestrianization was not feasible for Yonge Street itself, the less busy and connecting secondary streets provide great landscapes for workshopping.

The woonerf/living street model welcomes slow driving and promotes a better structure for pedestrians, cyclists, and local shop owners. Woonerf streets open the opportunity for cars to pass through, without limiting the agency of the pedestrians. This is possible by implementing paved regions, limited curbs, greenery, and sitting spaces. A case study that utilizes the woonerf living model is seen in Winnipeg, Manitoba. John Hirsch Place was reconstructed to be more equitable and accessible for pedestrians. This was achieved by implementing a public open space connecting to various city pathways and trees alongside the street (Gooden, 2020). This case study is an example of another Canadian city that prioritized pedestrian needs and increased their community connectivity. Our physical design suggests a woonerf implementation for Elm St and Edward St, which are located between Gerard St and Dundas St W. Both streets will have

implemented adjustable boulders to maintain a pedestrianized zone, but welcome cars when necessary. This will allow more seating and placemaking to occur on the street without obstructing the traffic flow.



Queens Quay Before and After Complete Street

Complete streets are well established in many European countries, as they allow for safe travel and equalized road use among all pedestrians, bikers, drivers, and users. It is supported among many sources that complete streets help uplift local communities, and limit the potential for crashes and injuries (Schneider R. J, 2018). Some characteristics include wide sidewalks, easy public transportation access, prominent turn lanes, bike lanes, and rest zones. A prominent case study that demonstrates complete streets is Toronto's Queen's Quay, which has a recently updated pedestrianized sector and a lengthy bike lane. Complete Streets for Canada reported that, "79% of people feel the new design has enhanced their experience" (Complete Streets for Canada, 2015). We are suggesting a complete street design on Gould Street. This implementation will allow more relaxed pedestrian use while still promising slower traffic flow.

The below drawings and map visualizes our proposed physical changes to the civic infrastructure on DT Yonge, and these work in tandem to support the above programming changes we recommend.



Map of Secondary Streets for Physical Design Based Interventions

a. Automatic Movable Road Dividers on Elm St

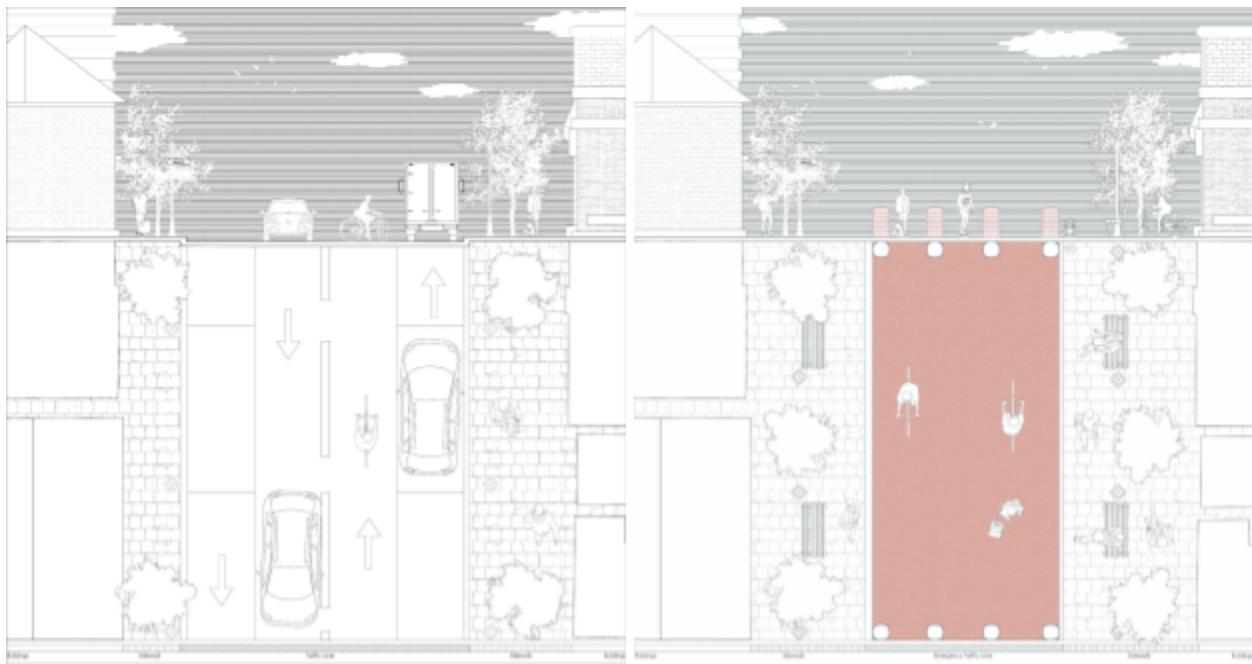


Figure. Plan Section Drawings Before and After

- The red markings indicate our proposed changes, and reallocates spaces to pedestrians and cyclists. We also increased seating for individuals.



Figure. Barriers moving for emergency vehicles

b. Complete Street on Gould St. (Near the World Food Market and on TMU campus)

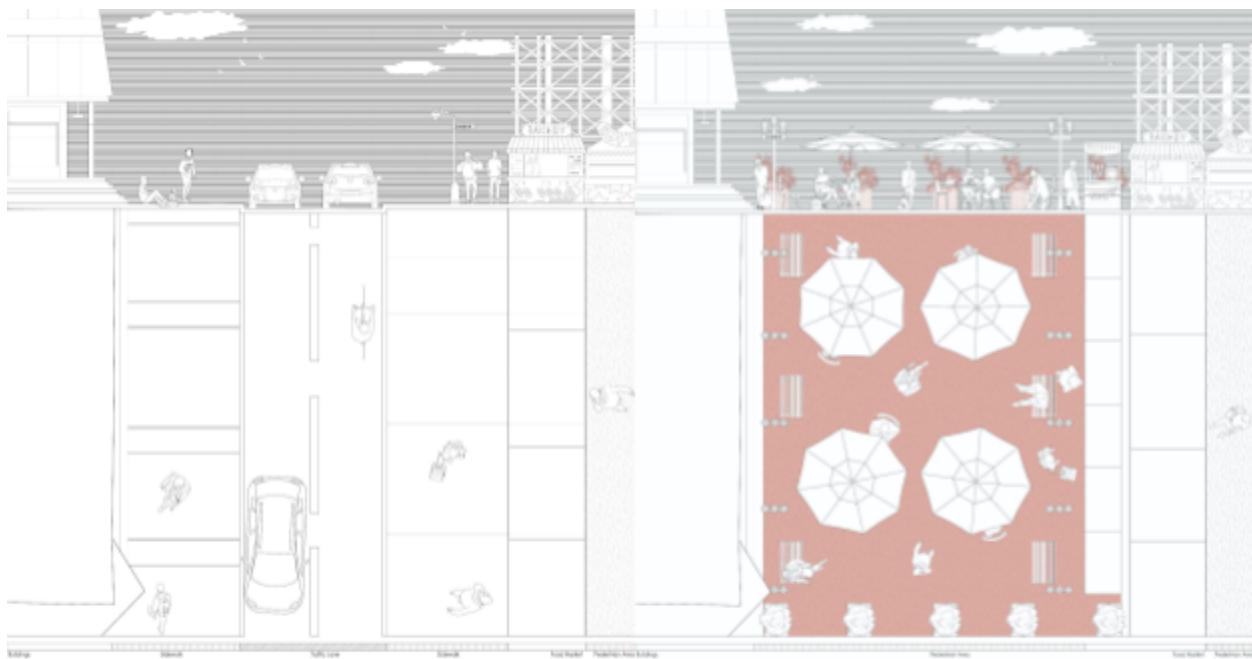


Figure. Plan Section Drawings Before and After

- Removal of curbs, whole area pedestrian zone, more seating and increased lighting.

C. Woonerfs Street Design for Edward S

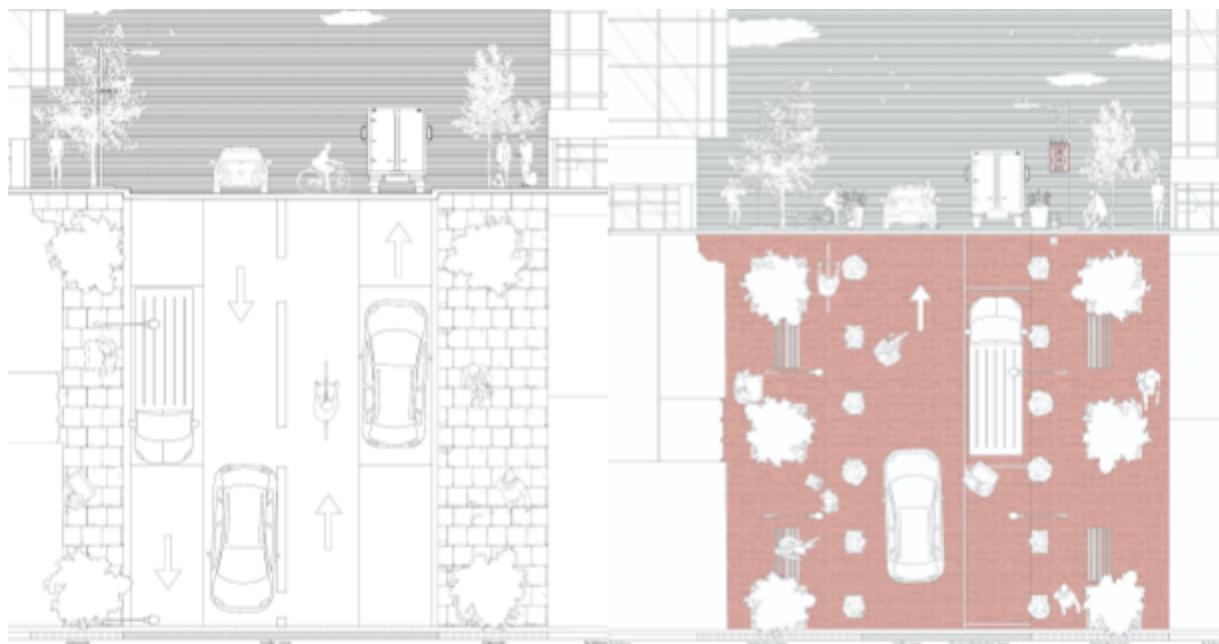


Figure. Plan Section Drawings Before and After

E. Municipal investments

Alongside physical and program based interventions, implementations from a municipal level may help target root issues existing in Downtown Yonge. As mentioned in our interviews with the DT Yonge BIA, there is a rapidly increasing number of homeless citizens in the main street. We identify that the Safe Inclusive Strategy from the Downtown Yonge BIA has compiled a dynamic list of strategies and techniques to combat this wicked issue. This document addresses street based issues including homelessness, violence, and substance abuse, and the need for funding in social infrastructure. Although the DT Yonge BIA provides many different suggestions of ways to alleviate pain points for Toronto's homeless population, it does not eradicate the root issue of poverty and extremely high living costs. By recognizing the need for mental health support in Toronto, municipal leaders can partner with impactful social groups and provide permanent change. Thus, the recommendation of partnering with municipal governors to increase social housing and safe injection sites may be an effective workaround to bring more people off the streets, and develop more safe and economically sustainable spaces.

Municipal investments can also be utilized to differentiate tax rates and subsidize rent between different types of businesses and building zones. This may be beneficial for developing Downtown Yonge to include more narrow storefronts from smaller businesses, instead of fine grained stores from extremely large retailers. For example, as mentioned in our primary data, pedestrians feel more comfortable and safe on streets with large sidewalks and a variety of individual stores, versus one large enterprise such as Eaton Centre. By conceptualizing from a municipal standpoint, it may strengthen a new kind of development on Yonge and Dundas that is more welcoming, without pushing out formerly established retailers. This also may be beneficial to fill the remaining and constant vacant storefronts which exist on Downtown Yonge.

Drawing from DT BIA's Safety, Social Inclusion and the Success of Main Streets (2020)

- Small grants for community activations with community organizations
- Cross-sectoral partnership with social impact organizations, harm reduction agencies, outreach workers, mental health hospitals
- Circulation of information on social services, food programs and shelters

- De-escalation techniques and mental health training and responses
- Engaging with marginalized and underrepresented communities, more public participatory and dialogue processes

VIII. Evaluation and Limitations

A. Evaluating our interventions (pugh chart)

Interventions	Baseline (Current Situation)	1: Increasing social infrastructure	2: differentiate tax and subsidized rent	3: placemaking activities	4: pedestrianizing secondary streets	5: Increase social spaces
Impact on marginalized groups	0	+2	0	0	0	0
Impact on local business	0	0	+2	+1	0	0
Impact on local community	0	+1	+1	+2	+1	+1
Enhancement of walkability	0	0	0	+2	+2	0

improvement of safety	0	0	0	0	+2	0
Reduction store vacancy	0	0	+1	0	0	0
Promotion of inclusivity	0	+2	0	+2	0	+1
Enhancement of local culture	0	0	0	+1	0	0
Total	0	5	4	8	5	2

In this unweighted Pugh Chart, each criterion is given equal importance and no criteria is assigned any weight or priority. The interventions are evaluated based on how well they address each criterion, and a score of 0, 1, or 2 is assigned to each intervention for each criterion, where 0 means the intervention does not address the criterion, 1 means it partially addresses the criterion, and 2 means it fully addresses the criterion.

According to this Pugh Chart, Intervention 3 (placemaking activities) has the highest total score of 8, followed by Intervention 1 and 4 (increasing social infrastructure and pedestrianizing secondary streets) both with a total score of 5. These interventions score high on criteria such as community-focused placemaking, enhancement of walkability, promotion of inclusivity and equity, and enhancement of local culture. Intervention 2 (differentiated tax rate and subsidized rent) scores 4, reflecting a focus on enhancement of walkability. Intervention 5 (increased social spaces) has the lowest score of 3, indicating that it does not address most of the criteria as well as the other interventions do.

B. Limitations

While the Pugh Chart is a useful tool for evaluating interventions, it does have some limitations. The first limitation is Subjectivity. The scores assigned to each intervention for each criterion are subjective and can vary depending on the evaluator. Different evaluators may have different opinions on how well an intervention addresses a particular criterion. Another limitation is the limited scope: The Pugh Chart only evaluates interventions based on a set of predetermined criteria. It does not account for any other factors or variables that may affect the effectiveness of the interventions, such as cost, feasibility, or political considerations. Finally, it does not accurately quantify the scores, and thus cannot be statistically analyzed. The Pugh Chart is a qualitative tool that does not provide any statistical analysis or data to support the evaluation of interventions. It relies on subjective scores assigned by evaluators, which may not always reflect the actual impact of the interventions.

IX. Conclusion

Our project aimed to address the problem of car-centric streets, lack of civic infrastructure, and weak community connectivity in post pandemic Downtown Yonge, with the goal of creating a more inclusive and safe environment for all residents and visitors. Through preliminary research on the history of the area, demographic composition, and interview findings, we proposed a series of interventions that would revive the area and improve the quality of life for its residents and visitors.

One of the main interventions we proposed was a combination of physical design-based interventions and program-based interventions. We suggested implementing woonerf streets, complete streets, and 'moving' boulder design to create safer and more accessible pedestrian areas. We also recommended implementing specific programming such as arts/culture-based programming, food events, overdose prevention initiatives, and pop-up/night markets to promote community building and increase foot traffic in the area.

In addition, we proposed municipal investments in key social infrastructure that marginalized groups depend on, including the creation of public spaces, amenities, and local business support. Our research showed that these types of interventions are effective in addressing issues of inclusivity and equity in urban areas.

Through a series of design iterations, we explored various options ranging from radical pedestrianization to focusing on secondary streets. Our proposed interventions are based on a locally-based transformation approach, which takes into account the needs and preferences of the community. Our design interventions take into account store vacancy, crime rate, pedestrian accidents, and traffic flow data to ensure that we are creating a safer and more welcoming environment for pedestrians and local businesses. By prioritizing pedestrian safety through the implementation of living streets, we can reduce the number of pedestrian accidents and create a more walkable environment. Additionally, by investing in social infrastructure, we can help to address the underlying issues that contribute to crime rates and store vacancy. In terms of traffic flow data, we understand that it is essential to balance the needs of motorists with the needs of pedestrians and local businesses. Our proposed 'moving' boulder design provides a unique solution to this challenge by creating a traffic-calming feature that also serves as a gathering place for community members.

To evaluate the effectiveness of our proposed interventions, we used a weighted Pugh Chart that takes into account the issues we try to address as criterions. This provides a comprehensive evaluation of the impact of our interventions.

A. Discussion of future work

Although we have proposed several interventions aimed at recovering downtown Yonge Street after the pandemic, ongoing work will be required to ensure the long-term success of these interventions.

One critical area for future work is ongoing evaluation and monitoring of the proposed interventions. We recommend that our community partner regularly assess the effectiveness of the interventions, gather feedback from stakeholders, and make adjustments as needed to ensure that the interventions remain relevant and effective.

Another area for future work is continued investment in social infrastructure. While our proposed interventions aim to address some of the underlying issues that contribute to crime rates and store vacancy, ongoing investment in social infrastructure, including community services and amenities, is essential for creating a more resilient and thriving community in the long term.

Overall, we have proposed several interventions aimed at recovering downtown Yonge after the pandemic, ongoing work will be required to ensure the long-term success of these interventions. By continuing to prioritize evaluation, social infrastructure investment, and community engagement, we can create a more vibrant and resilient community in Downtown Yonge.

X. Appendices

Appendix A: List of Indicators

Indicator Type	Content
Business Types (NAICS Code, Infogroup, 2021 Data)	Agriculture, forestry, fishing and hunting (11): 0 Mining, quarrying, and oil and gas extraction (21): 0 Utilities (22): 0 Construction (23): 6 Manufacturing (31-33): 0 Wholesale trade (41): 0 Retail trade (44-45): 190 Transportation and warehousing (48-49): 4 Information and cultural industries (51): 13 Finance and insurance (52): 11 Real estate and rental and leasing (53): 4 Professional, scientific and technical services (54): 25 Management of companies and enterprises (55): 0 Administrative and support, waste management and remediation services (56): 9 Educational services (61): 2 Health care and social assistance (62): 7 Arts, entertainment and recreation (71): 2 Accommodation and food services (72): 52 Other services (except public administration) (81): 19 Public administration (91): 0

Business Closures	There are many business closures on Downtown Yonge Street due to the COVID-19 pandemic, which brought a lot of financial hardship. Many smaller businesses have been replaced by larger corporate chains.
Storefront Vacancies	384 Yonge St 368-370 Yonge St 366 Yonge St 322 Yonge St 330 Yonge St 328 Yonge St 302 Yonge St 475 Yonge St 777 Bay St 415 Yonge St 372 Yonge St 374 A Yonge St 346 Yonge St 340 Yonge St 335-331 Yonge St 333 Yonge St 329 Yonge St 20 Edward St 271 Yonge St 418-483 Bay St 252 Victoria St 777 Bay St 415 Yonge Street
Population Change	The population of the Toronto Centre area, which includes most of Downtown Yonge, was 103,805 in 2016 and 119,901 in 2021. The population increased by 15.5%.
Changes in Median Income (Census 2016 versus Census 2021 Data via CensusMapper)	<u>Household median income</u> 2020 65,500 2015 55,808 <u>Individual median income</u>

	2020 40,800 2019 35,600
Types of Public Transportation & Available Routes (how many bus/subway stops, terminals)	3 TTC subway stations: College, Dundas and Queen 3 bus stops: Yonge St at Shutter St, Yonge St at Dundas St West and Yonge St at Gould St

Appendix B: Interview Questions

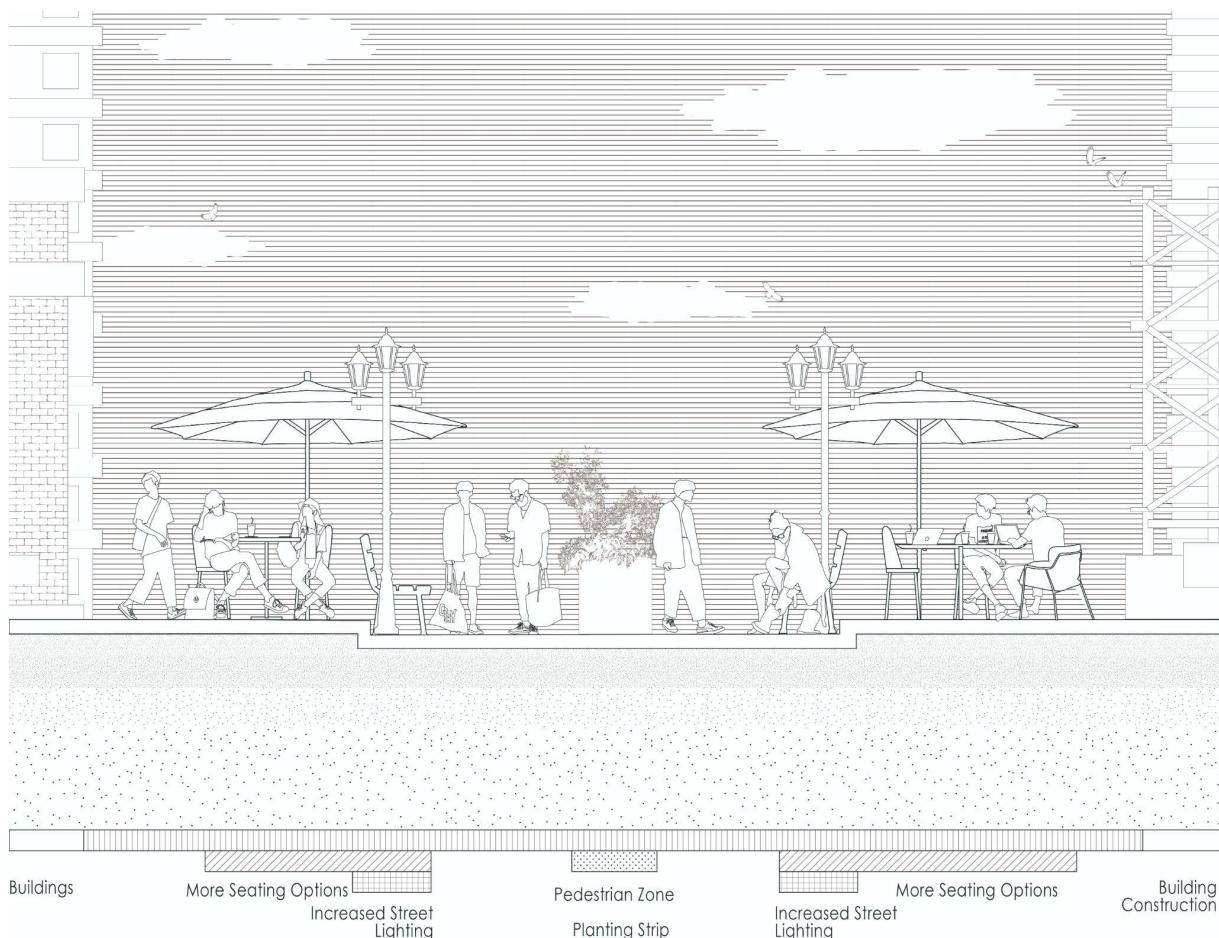
Stakeholder	Interview Questions
Canadian Urban Institute (CUI)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● What are making main streets come back? ● What does success and resilience on main streets look like? ● How do temporary vacancies and store closures impact the social dynamics of a main street and what role does civic infrastructure play in fostering those interactions? ● What kinds of civic infrastructure would CUI like to see enhanced in Downtown Yonge? And how can current civic infrastructure be improved? ● When creating safer and inclusive streets for all, how does this play in the dynamics of securitized spaces? ● How can we have more permanent placemaking activities on Downtown Yonge?

<p>Toronto Metropolitan University (TMU) Students and Local Business Retailers</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● What do you think the strengths of the street are? ● What are your experiences as a student in Downtown Yonge? ● Do you feel safe on the Toronto Metropolitan University campus? ● How do you utilize the streets? Do you have a favourite spot? ● Did you visit the campus frequently during the pandemic? What about this year? ● In your opinion, what are the current existing civic sites and infrastructure that contribute to the resilience of the street? ● What changes would you like to see on the street? What improvements can be made to existing civic sites and infrastructure you listed?
<p>Downtown Yonge Business Improvement Area (BIA)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Why is DT Yonge such an important street? ● What are some of the strengths and weaknesses of Downtown Yonge? ● Activity in DT Yonge is usually at its highest during Friday's and weekend's. How do you think this impacts the physical design of the space? smaller events, safety ● What would the DYBIA would like to see in the upcoming years? ● What are some indicators or benchmarks DYBIA is using to measure or evaluate how successful

your programs are? Different people using streets, suppliers, shoppers, residents, tourist, students. D

- Safety is a big issue in Downtown Yonge for many pedestrians. What steps can the DYBIA take to tackle this?
- What impact do you think business closures/vacancies have had on the street? How can they be transformed?

Appendix C: Previous Section Drawings





Appendix D: Traffic Volume Map in Fall 2022 (per 10 min)



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