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WESTON 2021 ULI TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE PANEL REPORT





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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Background:

- Urban Land Institute (ULI) is a nonprofit education and research institute that focuses on the use of land to enhance communities. ULI Toronto was organized as a chapter in 2005 and has quickly grown to over 500 members.
- In 2010 the ULI Outreach Committee decided to conduct a Technical Assistance Panel (TAP) initiative both to provide advice and assistance to a neighbourhood in need and to raise the profile of ULI Toronto.
- The old Village of Weston emerged as an appropriate candidate for a TAP initiative for a number of reasons:
 - (a) It was once a thriving, independent village but has been on a slow decline since the 1960's.
 - (b) It is a magnet for new immigrants to the City who bring vitality but also social and community pressures.
 - (c) Crime is an issue, although the perception is worse than the reality.
 - (d) The community has not participated in the recent building boom taking place in many other parts of the City.
 - (e) There are major infrastructure investments underway by Metrolinx, the regional transportation authority. There will be a Weston stop on the new high-speed rail line between the airport and downtown (currently under construction), and there is a promise of improved GO commuter-train service in the future
 - (f) The City of Toronto is also involved in the community with many different Divisions working on a variety of planning, community and social programs.

Weston 2021:

- In early 2011, the City of Toronto Planning Division began a long-range initiative called Weston 2021 Initiative as an umbrella to coordinate all the projects underway in Weston.
- In May 2011, the first step in the Weston 2021 Initiative was a 2-1/2 day Design Charrette to examine development potential of three main areas in the heart of Weston Village.
- The Design Charette was based on the assumption that the large public transportation investment, along with the very robust Toronto real estate market, would make Weston a good candidate for private-sector development.

TAP Overview:

- The TAP was organized one month following the charrette in order to examine the charrette development proposals and to assess whether they were feasible and if not, what it would take to make them feasible.
- The City of Toronto and Metrolinx agreed to act as clients for the TAP.
- The TAP Panel included a group of 10 real estate, planning and design experts from ULI Toronto's membership.
- The TAP workshop was held on May 31 and June 1, 2011, at the Weston Baptist Church in the heart of Weston Village.
- The workshop began with a look at the Village Centre, and examined what it might take to make the whole area work, function and look better in the future.
- The Panel next turned its attention to the three study areas examined at the charrette.
- The Panel examined the design alternatives and then worked with the design volunteers to create images of the revised development possibilites.

TAP Conclusions and Next Steps:

- The Panel concluded that the charrette assumptions about the short-term development of Weston Village were unrealistic.
- The major transportation initiatives including the new GO station, the stop on the new high-speed train to the airport, the Air-Rail Link (ARL), and modest GO commuter train service improvements were all very positive, but not sufficient on their own to create a market for neighbourhood development.
- Based on recent market information and their assessment of the area, the Panel concluded that the revitalization of Weston Village was going to require a series of smaller community initiatives that would help Weston create a more positive image.
- The Panel felt that, with the help of the strategies outlined in this report, Weston could become a revitalized and vibrant community in the future.



Population: Ontario: 12.5 million; GTA: 5.5 million; Toronto: 2.6 million



Map of the City of Toronto showing the location of Weston Village in black and the Weston 2021 Study Area in red. The area has very good access to the regional highway system and will receive improved GO commuter-train service and a stop on the new Air-Rail Link.

1. INTRODUCTION

A. THE URBAN LAND INSTITUTE - ULI

ULI is a nonprofit research and education organization supported by its members. Founded in 1936, the institute now has nearly 30,000 members worldwide representing the entire spectrum of land use and real estate development disciplines, working in private enterprise and public service.

As the pre-minent multidisciplinary real estate forum, ULI facilitates the open exchange of ideas, information and experience among local, national and international industry leaders and policy makers dedicated to creating better places.

ULI's mission is to provide leadership in the responsible use of land and in the creation of thriving and sustainable communities worldwide. Members say that ULI is a trusted idea place where leaders come to grow professionally and personally through sharing, mentoring and problem solving. With pride, ULI members commit to the best in land use policy and practice.

B. ULI TORONTO DISTRICT COUNCIL

Toronto is Canada's largest city with a population of 2.6 million and a regional population of 5.5 million. ULI Toronto was the first District Council established in Canada, and is one of the fastest growing councils in the entire ULI network. It currently has over 500 members.

The Toronto District Council is one of the most active organizations in the Greater Toronto Area real estate community, creating programs and presenting events each year that feature international speakers, local experts and international research studies. Events focus on many topical issues and range from intimate members-only gatherings to large public programs.



Sponsoring agencies

Urban Land Toronto Institute



C. TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE PANEL PROGRAM

The ULI Technical Assistance Panel (TAP) is a high-profile industry program that brings together the finest expertise in the real estate, planning and development fields to collaborate on complex land use and redevelopment projects. The program is organized by the ULI Outreach Committee and typically convenes 6-12 members of the ULI Chapter to provide a meaningful contribution toward the revitalization of a city neighbourhood or district. At the conclusion of the TAP program, ULI compiles a summary of the presentations and recommendations in a TAP Report to be presented to the clients. The clients for the Weston ULI TAP program are the City of Toronto and Metrolinx.

D. WESTON 2021 REVITALIZATION INITIATIVE

The City of Toronto, through various Divisions, has been undertaking a number of initiatives in Weston over the past decade. The City recently moved to organize and coordinate all of this work into one consolidated effort — the Weston 2021 Revitalization Initiative, which it defines as a collaborative, action-oriented neighbourhood revitalization effort. Weston 2021 builds on the work that Metrolinx, the regional transportation authority, is conducting in the area – specifically, the development of a new high-speed rail line from downtown to the airport, known as the Air-Rail Link (ARL). The ARL will have a stop in Weston and the track improvements will also result in improvements to the existing GO commuter-train service between Weston and downtown.

The goal of the Weston 2021 Revitalization Initiative is to provide inspiration and constructive ideas for how Weston may position itself to thrive and take advantage of the new transit infrastructure over the next decade. The initiative was organized around two major events:

Design Charrette (May 3 to May 5, 2011)
 ULI TAP Workshop (May 31 and June 1, 2011)

The conclusions from the Weston 2021 Design Charrette were summarized in a charrette report prepared by the urban design consulting firm duToit Allsopp, Hillier - dtah (www. toronto.uli.org/outreachinitiative). Ultimately, the results of the design charrette and TAP exercises will be incorporated into a Weston 2021 Revitalization Initiatives report to be completed in early 2012 for consideration by Etobicoke York Community Council and City Council. The report will identify a range of City and agency initiatives and actions for the Weston Community and set out a coordinating and decision-making framework to oversee, prioritize and advance revitalization initiatives in the area.



Weston 2021 Design Charrette – May 3-5, 2011







A charrette is a multi-day design workshop held on-site by a group of designers, the local community, City staff and key stakeholders. The focused effort allows a large number of design ideas to be examined in a short time and then distilled into a few key alternatives.



The Weston 2021 Design Charrette Study Area - aerial perspective looking northeast.



E. WESTON DESIGN CHARRETTE OVERVIEW

The Weston 2021 Design Charrette (May 3 to May 5, 2011) was a three-day intensive design workshop organized by the Urban Design Section of the City Planning Division. The main goal of the charrette was to provide some preliminary design and development ideas and images for the redevelopment of Weston that could then be tested later by the ULI Technical Assistance Panel experts at the TAP workshop.

A team of designers, led by duToit Allsopp Hillier, examined the area north of Lawrence Ave. near the former GO (commuter train) parking lot. A second team, led by Urban Strategies and Metrolinx, focused on the area south of Lawrence Ave. where the new GO/ARL station and parking lot is being built. A third team, led by Turner Fleischer and ERA Architects along with the City's Tower Renewal Office, focused their attention on a 1960's-era slabapartment complex at 1765 and 1775 Weston Rd. adjacent to the new station site.

Members of the Weston community participated throughout the charrette. This focused effort allowed a large number of design ideas to be quickly explored and then distilled into a few key, practical, short and long-term design alternatives that the community was able to help shape and endorse.

F. WESTON TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE PANEL (TAP) PROGRAM

The Weston TAP program was unique as it used the ideas generated from the design charrette and tested their development feasibility against current and future market conditions.

As more fully described in this report, the TAP was asked to address the development potential for the Weston Area in general and for the three specific areas studied in the design charrette; (1) Weston Town Centre/John St. Area (2) New GO Station Area, and (3) 1765 and 1775 Weston Rd.

The panel was asked to assess if the upcoming improved transit development would provide an impetus for development in the area, and if not, what would. It was also asked to address the feasibility of the developments proposed by the Design Charrette.

Both the Charrette and ULI TAP reports will serve as the background for a more intense and involved Weston 2021 Revitalization Initiative led by the City of Toronto. The intent of the initiative is to coordinate, prioritize and advance the investment actions and capital improvements in Weston over the next decade.

2. WESTON'S HISTORY AND BACKGROUND

Weston was first established in the 1790's when Governor Simcoe felt it was desirable to settle British soldiers on the land. This early settlement remains in the present-day physical form and lay of the land. Weston continued to grow in the early 1800's due to the proximity of the Humber River and nearby natural resources. Industries were subsequently established, such as sawmills and gristmills operating at the edge of the river. The Farr brothers, operators of a sawmill and a grist mill, named the village after their hometown of Weston, Hertfordshire, in England.



Early map of the Village of Weston

Weston has a rich and diverse history in transportation of various forms including wagon, rail, aviation, car and bicycle. The coming of the Grand Trunk Railway (now the CN) in 1856 and the Toronto, Grey and Bruce Railway (now the CP) in 1869 provided a tremendous economic stimulus to the Village of Weston, leading to the expansion of local industries. In 1881, the Village of Weston was described as "having excellent railway facilities, an abundance of water power and proximity to Toronto." These attributes continue to have a strong correlation with the Weston we know today, particularly in view of the new Metrolinx and GO Transit plans. Starting in 1850, James Cruickshank built a carriage and wagon works factory on Weston Rd., north of Lawrence Ave. W. The family converted it to a Ford Motor dealership in 1945. Cruickshank Motors Ltd. remained in the family until 2006, when it was sold to another Ford dealer who has kept the Cruickshank name.

The most recognizable transportation sector linked to Weston is the bicycle. Weston is often referred to as "The Home of the Bicycle." In 1917, the Canada Cycle and Motor Co. Ltd. (CCM) was built on Lawrence Ave. W. just east of Weston Rd., where CCM manufactured bicycles for 66 years, until it closed its doors in 1983. Weston enjoyed its existence as a thriving, independent community with several local industries that formed the backbone of the local economy until the 1970's, when industrial uses began leaving the area.

In 1967 Weston became part of the Borough of York, and in 1998 it was amalgamated, along with the other former municipalities, into the City of Toronto. Today, Weston is no longer thriving as it once was. It has an average household income below the city-wide average, and it has faced significant job losses over the past three decades. There are concerns about personal safety and crime. Weston is an area in need of revitalization and is recognized as a Priority Neighbourhood by the City of Toronto.





Weston Rd looking north at Lawrence Ave. W. – early 1900's

Weston Rd looking north at Lawrence Ave. W. - 2011

Despite the challenges, Weston continues to have a strong sense of community with an active residents' association and Business Improvement Area (BIA) group. During the warm weather months the Weston BIA operates a very successful farmers' market on the current GO parking lot north of John St. The market was opened in 1979 and became an instant hit with local residents and beyond. The Weston Farmers' Market runs every Saturday morning from mid-May until the end of October. This mid-sized seasonal market has approximately 25-30 vendors and includes a small antiques and collectibles section. It continues to grow in popularity, with an estimated 750-1,500 people in attendance every week. The market generates approximately \$30,000 a year in vendors' fees for the BIA, which goes into its annual operating budget. The community is quite diverse, with more established neighbourhoods east of the tracks and a largely new immigrant population that occupies the apartments along Weston Rd. The one place that seems to attract all Weston residents is the farmers' market.

Recently, there have been a number of events that could have a positive impact on the Weston Area. Foremost, Metrolinx is working on a rapid transit rail system between Pearson International Airport and Union Station to be in place by 2015. This transit corridor will benefit the Weston community, as it will have a stop in Weston providing very frequent service to both the airport and downtown in less than 20 minutes. The existing GO Transit service along the corridor will also be modestly improved.

The City has also undertaken a number of initiatives that could positively impact the Weston Area, including the Tower Renewal Program and a study to consider the possibility of introducing an Arts and Cultural Centre into the area. Further, George Brown College has considered the area for a potential new campus.

The City of Toronto and Metrolinx believe the new transit line and other potential initiatives may help stimulate revitalization in the area. The visions created at the design charrette and the market examination by the ULI TAP have a common goal: to better understand how to create positive change for the area through development in the community.





Weston Farmers' Market

John St. looking east

Weston Farmers' Market



Existing GO station



Metrolinx map showing ARL and GO routes

3. CHARGE TO THE PANEL

A. PROBLEM STATEMENT AND PANEL'S ASSIGNMENT

Toronto has been experiencing a phenomenal building boom over the past decade and is now a world leader in condominium development. Unfortunately, this development and revitalization have not been shared equally by all areas of the City – areas such as Weston have received almost no new development.

Once a prosperous and self-contained small town, Weston lost much of its manufacturing base during the 1960's and 70's. During the same period, a number of large, slab-form apartment towers were constructed. These towers have recently become home to large numbers of relatively low-income, new immigrants who have brought a new sense of vibrancy to the area while also placing a strain on social services. Weston also has some issues with crime and suffers from the perception that crime is prevalent in the neighbourhood. On a positive note, Weston has retained a sense of small-town pride and boasts a very well organized and committed community association as well as a successful Business Improvement Area (BIA).

The community was instrumental in convincing Metrolinx to create a stop in Weston on the proposed Union-Pearson Air-Rail Link to be in place by 2015. This line will provide all-day service to both the airport and downtown in less than 20 minutes. The GO Transit service along the corridor will also be improved within the next few years.

Development often follows major investment in community infrastructure and transit, and long-term benefits are likely to come to the community in terms of development and community revitalization. The ideas proposed at the design charrette and the market examination by the ULI TAP intend to understand how to attract this reinvestment and development and create positive change in the community.

The TAP was asked to expand on the work completed at the design charrette and to examine the feasibility of the charrette's development concepts. Design charrettes can be very inspirational, but sometimes they result in images and ideas for a community that are not feasible. The TAP was asked to ground the ideas formulated at the charrette in reality by testing them against current and potential market conditions.















Weston TAP walking tour - May 31, 2011



Weston TAP Team Study Areas







ULI Toronto District Council – Technical Assistance Panel (TAP)

B. QUESTIONS POSED TO THE WESTON 2021 TAP PARTICIPANTS

i. Neighbourhood Potential

The Panel was asked to address the following questions and challenges related to Weston Village in general:

- 1. With the major investment in the rail corridor, what is the potential for market development in the Weston Area?
- 2. If development is not feasible at this time, what needs to be done to encourage/ facilitate development in the future?

ii. Site-Specific Potential

The Panel was also asked to address questions related to the following three areas:

- Study Area I Weston Centre/John St. Area: TPA parking lot & adjacent sites
- Study Area 2 New GO Station Area: The Metrolinx & adjacent sites
- Study Area 3 Tower Renewal Area: 1765 & 1775 Weston Rd.

The site-specific questions asked of the Panel were as follows:

- I. Are the design ideas developed during the charrette currently feasible?
- 2. What is the current development potential for the site?
- 3. What is the future development potential for the site?

iii. TAP Workshop

The TAP workshop was held on May 31 and June I, 2011, in the Weston Park Baptist Church (located adjacent to the proposed new Metrolinx Train Station). The first day began with a series of brief background presentations to the Panel members given by ULI, City staff, community stakeholders and the team leaders from the design charrette. This was followed by a site tour of the three study areas and the immediate surrounding context.

The Panel members spent the remaining day-and-a-half in various groups and as a whole addressing the questions posed to them.

4. TAP FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

A. THE DEVELOPMENT POTENTIAL OF WESTON VILLAGE

i) Issues and Questions

- The TAP was asked to comment on the visions created at the charrette and assess the current development potential in Weston, taking into consideration the upcoming transit improvements.
- If the Panel did not feel that development was feasible, it was to recommend actions that could help generate development in the future.

The charrette's visions for Weston Village were as follows:

- The street system could be improved to make it easier and more convenient for people to move around and through the neighbourhood. For example: (a) South Station St. could be improved to connect the Weston Market Area to the new GO station; (b) the Humber Valley could be better connected to Weston Rd. via the east-west secondary streets; (c) a new green "Emerald Necklace" could connect the new rail tunnel lid to Weston Rd. and the Humber Valley.
- The "main street" feel and character should be maintained, although cosmetic upgrades and more desirable retail would enhance the experience.
- · Stepping back from the main street and further to the north and south along Weston Rd., more substantial development could be supported, bookending and showcasing the main street.



Neighbourhood connectivity diagram from the Weston 2021 Design Charrette



South Station St. looking north toward John St. (April 2011)



South Station St. looking north toward John Street showing proposed streetscape improvements



Charrette diagram showing proposed neighbourhood connectivity improvements including South Station St. between the new GO station and John St. and the "Emerald Necklace" connecting the neighbourhood to the Humber Valley

ii) Findings

- Overall, the TAP supported the vision of Weston developed at the charrette; however, in the short term it felt there was a limited likelihood of new market development as proposed by the charrette perspective on revitalization.
- In the last several years there has been some low-rise townhouse and walk-up development in the area, but almost no high-rise development.
- There is currently one site (the former Cruickshank Motors site a superior site along the Humber River) where development is being considered. The owners have recently received City approval of a rezoning application for an 18-storey condominium tower with retail space at grade. The building is not yet being marketed, and the units would have to sell for approximately \$400 p.s.f. to make development feasible based on current construction costs and market conditions.
- The TAP did not feel the development potential for the area would improve sufficiently with the new rapid transit rail system between Pearson International Airport and Union Station (estimated by 2015) and the improved GO service alone.

- It was the opinion of the Panel that until transit was proven to be both affordable and true all-day service it would not on its own significantly enhance the potential for development in the area.
- Other areas throughout the City would be chosen before Weston due to the potential for higher returns, lower risks and easier marketability.
- The TAP perspective on revitalization is that there would have to be physical, social and economic improvements to Weston before market development would occur.
- The determination was that at this time the most likely viable option was low-rise, stick-built development. However, the Panel expressed a more positive feeling about development in Weston in the longer term, once some of the physical, social and economic issues were addressed.
- The area has many great attributes: proximity to a range of retail and service commercial uses, a great amenity in the Humber Valley, superior recreational infrastructure, excellent highway access, a well-established heritage community and good proximity to downtown and Pearson Airport.



The Charrette perspective on revitalization:



Development Viability Economics

As mentioned above, based on current market conditions, there is a limited likelihood of new development in Weston as illustrated in the following examples:

RETAIL DEVELOPMENT



Weston retail rent: \$6-\$10 p.s.f. (net)



Market rent – new retail prime locations: **\$23-\$26 p.s.f. (net)**

RESIDENTIAL RENTALS





Market rent – new multi-res 2 bedroom:

\$1,875 - \$2,250 = approximately \$2.50 - \$3.00 p.s.f. / mo.

There have only been a handful of new residential rental developments in the GTA over the past two decades, primarily in the most central locations.

HIGH-RISE CONDOMINIUM DEVELOPMENT



Weston resale condominiums: **\$200 - \$250 p.s.f.**



Minimum Toronto new condo sales price: **\$400 p.s.f.**

LOW-RISE TOWNHOUSE DEVELOPMENT





Weston resale townhouse price: **\$200 - \$250 p.s.f.**

Minimum Toronto new townhouse sales price: **\$300 p.s.f.**

Weston has experienced some low-rise infill development, and it appears to have been reasonably successful (Country Homes – Weston Rd. and St Philips Rd.). Some opportunities exist for infill townhouses or infill "laneway" housing.

iii) Recommendations and Next Steps

- In order to attract development to Weston the TAP concluded the community would have to continue to improve itself and improve its image.
- The TAP provided a number of initiatives that may help in this regard. Some were smaller first steps within the control of the community. Others were larger items which the community may not have control over but may be able to influence.

Some suggestions were:

- Create a marketing campaign for Weston. For example: "GO to Weston" and "I LIVE Weston"
- 2. Improve neighbourhood connectivity and walkability











- 3. Improve safety and perceived safety in the area
- 4. Create more community events that unite the whole of Weston
- 5. Pursue an Arts and Cultural Centre (see TAP Study Area I below)
- 6. Try and attract an Institutional or Educational User (See TAP Study Area 2 below)
- 7. Provide regular and affordable transit
- TAP members generally felt that City efforts to reduce the cost of development could provide another building block to increase the potential for private development; however, on its own, this may not be enough. It was suggested that the City could further enhance Weston through a series of small investments to market and improve the local amenities to attract more residents and visitors to the area.





B. TAP STUDY AREA 1: WESTON CENTRE / JOHN STREET AREA: TORONTO PARKING AUTHORITY (TPA) SITE

i) Issues and Questions

- The TAP examined the area northeast of Weston Rd. and Lawrence Ave., centred on John St. and the Toronto Parking Authority (TPA) site.
- The TPA site consists of 1.4 acres and has 190 parking stalls, located on the north side of John St., just east of Weston Rd. There is a 0.41-acre vacant site adjacent to the property on the west side.
- · The TPA parking lot currently serves the existing GO station on weekdays as well as retail uses on Weston Rd.
- On Saturdays during the warm-weather months the parking lot also serves as the home of the successful, longstanding, BIA-run Weston Farmers' Market.
- · Once the new GO station is built there will no longer be a commuter-parking requirement for the lot.
- The local councillor and community feel strongly that the farmers' market should stay on this site. The TPA would like to keep 100 parking stalls on the site to service Weston Rd.
- The local councillor has worked to have an Arts and Cultural Centre added to Weston and believes the TPA site would be the ideal location. A study on the feasibility of this plan was conducted by Artscape, a local not-for-profit organization specializing in this field. The TPA believes that the opportunity exists to create revenue from the site by selling it as a residential development site. The revenue from this development could generate funds for the Arts and Cultural Centre and/or the centre could be housed in the new development.
- Based on the direction provided by the councillor and the TPA, the charrette contemplated high-density development on the site that would help to partially fund the Arts and Cultural Centre
- The TAP panel was asked to assess the findings of the charrette in context of the desires of the community, the local councillor and the TPA.



TAP Study Area I: Weston Centre / John St. Area



Example of an indoor farmers' market

TPA parking lot - home of the Weston BIA Farmers' Market



Wychwood Barns - example of a successful Arts and Cutural Centre



John St. looking east toward the rail tracks

ii) Findings

- Based on current economics the Panel did not feel that high-rise development would be likely in the short term, particularly given the further constraints of adding an Arts and Cultural Centre and the 100-stall parking requirement. Even if it was feasible, it would not generate significant revenue toward community benefit. Although low-rise development may be more achievable, the Panel did not feel it would be the best use of the land.
- The Panel believed that Weston Farmers' Market is of significance to the community and that it should continue. However, tying up the site for a few days' use in the summer was not the best use of the site.
- The Panel also felt that bringing an Arts and Cultural Centre to the community could be a great benefit and a further catalyst for the revitalization of Weston.
- With the new rail link, John St. would be closed to vehicular traffic across the tracks. A pedestrian bridge would link the residential neighbourhood to the east to the commercial centre to the west.

iii) Recommendations and Next Steps

The Panel felt that the TPA site and surrounding area could be developed and improved over time in phases. Three basic phases were identified.

Phase I – Improve the Streetscape

 Phase I includes investment in the public realm. The TAP felt that John St., with Metrolinx already investing in the new pedestrian bridge, could be further enhanced by improving the quality of the public realm. Improvements to John St., such as tree plantings, landscaping, aesthetically pleasing streetscape materials and furniture could vastly improve the feel of the area. A new lane to connect to King St. would improve traffic and public flow.





Aerial photo looking south across the TPA parking lot down South Station St. John St. runs across the middle.

TAP Study Area I: Phase I

Phase 2 – Relocate Farmers' Market

• Once the streetscape improvements have been made to John St., a new "Market District" can be created by shifting the Weston Farmers' Market from the TPA lot onto John St. The location has the benefit of leaving the market in the area that everyone is familiar with while at the same time extending the vibrancy of the market along John St. all the way to the main retail strip on Weston Rd. This frees up the TPA site for development.



John St. existing conditions: Looking east from Weston Rd.



John St. Proposal: Showing streetscape improvements and the relocated Farmers' Market



Phase 2 showing the improvements to John St., the proposed new laneway connection to King St., the relocated Farmers' Market, the potential Arts and Cultural Centre site, and the new TPA parking lot



Examples of successful street-related farmers' markets