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To: Members of the Planning and Transportation Committee City of Toronto

From: Toronto Society of Architects
Joe Lobko, Chair

Re: Proposed By-Law to Regulate Drive Thrus

On behalf of the TSA, I am here to express our full support for the passage of a proposed by-law regulating the development of drive-thrus in Toronto, and suggesting the development of design guidelines for those, I hope, rare locations where they might still be allowed. The acceptance of the planning department report is, in our view, fundamental to the concept of "City Building"... to development and re-development initiatives intended to preserve and enhance the characteristics of our City that are essential, and basic, and that make it work from both an aesthetic and functional perspective.

Fundamental to the identity of Toronto, at least the old City, are the its many strong neighbourhoods, all anchored around a "main street", the commercial core that services and sustains and gives identity to these neighbourhoods. These main streets are most active, vibrant and economically viable where they combine a number of characteristics, but chief among them, I would argue, is that they are pedestrian friendly environments, both accommodating and interesting to the people that make a point to come here to shop, eat, have a coffee and to generally share in the life of the City at its best. The continuous and uninterrupted wall of commercial and residential building, fronted by a generous sidewalk, (ideally with room for an outdoor café), is an essential characteristic of the most successful sections of our main streets. This is a fundamental building block of our great city.

I live in Riverdale and have for the past 20 years or so, a great Toronto neighbourhood anchored by a section of the Danforth, a street that is wonderful to take a walk along. In fact the place is full of people walking and driving along the street, all day long, every day of the year. The role of vehicular thoroughfare is here secondary to the place that has been created, a place with the dominance of the pedestrian in mind, a place that is very successful for the retailers that provide it with its essential character. There is one place in the middle that is a little more special, a public square at the intersection of Logan where people hang around the fountain on a Saturday night, but otherwise the street wall is uninterrupted. The Taste of the Danforth, an annual Summer street festival, attracts over a million people each year. While there are always some problems, the Danforth works pretty well, a strong and economically vibrant Main street. We've recently seen McDonalds, Wendy's, Tim Hortons, and other mall shops make inroads on the most vibrant section of the Danforth, attracted no doubt by its success. I have difficulty imagining the impact of just one drive thru on the main street of my neighbourhood, on the Danforth. If McDonalds or Wendys, is allowed to construct a drive thru, perhaps by taking a building or two down, thereby creating rather than healing a wound in the City fabric, does that mean that Tim Hortons can do that too, and the TD Bank next? Before long I'd say goodbye to the "Taste of the Danforth..." "Taste of the Fast Food Chains" just doesn't have quite the same ring to it

Half of the people on the Danforth on a Friday or Saturday night are coming from the sterile and homogeneous suburban environments that line the fringe of the GTA. They are GTA tourists, coming in for a temporary escape from the physical environments that those places represent, for a taste of the life of the City. Why on earth would they want to come here if the City started to look like the place they were escaping. Many of those more enlightened suburban municipalities are trying as hard as they can to address the many urban design problems that they possess, in many cases by emulating the success and form of the traditional inner city. Let's not bring their problems to us.

To the developers of the McDonalds at St Clair and Christie, I respectfully suggest, why don't you break new ground for your organization? Fight the homogenizing trend of building and site design that your companies' approach to corporate identity and marketing has led you, and so many other corporations like yours. Why don't you fill your site with building instead of cars, including a sidewalk café, or... even a fountain. Get rid of your parking lot. If you have room for another retailer or complementary use, go for it. You might even consider putting some housing on top in a manner consistent with the historical development of St Clair and the proposed official plan. Develop your site with the recognition that you are in downtown Toronto and not on the fringe of anytown, any collector road, anywhere in North America.

I suspect most people have a pretty good idea of why they go to McDonalds and many of the other fast food restaurants around, and I don't think that it has much to do with the ambiance of the place. Surely those that make the decisions within that organization cannot believe that people go to McDonalds because of the great buildings and environments that they construct, all that lovely asphalt and allegedly easy to maintain plastic and clashing tile, and the ever present, larger than life, golden arch. McDonalds from what I can tell does its best in other areas of its activity, to be a good community and corporate citizen, for which I think they have received well deserved acclaim. Why therefore., are they so apparently ignorant of the quality of the built environments that they create and foist upon the rest of us. They could be doing so much better and I suspect that they do have the capacity to change their approach to the design development of their restaurants, if only they would dedicate their energies to this as they do to so many other facets of their business. To the Councilors here today, we say, ...Let's encourage them along with the passage of this by-law!

On a final note, on behalf of the TSA, I would like to commend first of all, the local ratepayers in the St Clair/Christie area for their vision and perseverance in bringing this initiative forward, an initiative from which the whole City stands to benefit. I would also like to commend the planning department of the City of Toronto for putting together a by-law which looks promising in preserving and enhancing an essential characteristic of our great city.

On behalf of the Toronto Society of Architects,

Joe Lobko
Chair, 2002