

REPORT

SPECIAL PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL MEETING

MEETING DATE: APRIL 10, 2018

FROM: Engineering and Construction Department and Planning Services Department

DATE: March 15, 2018

SUBJECT: Information Report: Wayfinding Initiative for Downtown Oakville

LOCATION: Downtown Oakville

WARD: 3

Page 1

RECOMMENDATION:

1. That the information report, entitled *Wayfinding Initiative for Downtown Oakville* dated March 15, 2018, be received; and
2. That staff proceed with the next steps as outlined in the report dated March 15, 2018 from the Engineering and Construction and Planning Services departments.

KEY FACTS:

The following are key points for consideration with respect to this report:

- The need for a Downtown Wayfinding Initiative was identified through public consultation with the Downtown Transportation and Streetscape Study
- Wayfinding supports multiple objectives, including navigation through the downtown during and after construction, as well as active transportation
- The Wayfinding Initiative will focus on Lakeshore Road first as part of the streetscape project, with the goal to expand the initiative throughout Downtown Oakville and beyond
- Wayfinding supports the mitigation strategy for the Lakeshore Road project, by providing navigational assistance during the construction and can also include elements to support or enhance smart cities initiatives

- Public engagement regarding wayfinding tools and general principles has taken place
- Next steps include confirming exact locations and designs for the proposed wayfinding information pillars

BACKGROUND:

Downtown Transportation and Streetscape Study

During the consultation process for the Downtown Transportation and Streetscape Study (DTS) and resulting Lakeshore Road redevelopment works, business owners and residents raised concerns about the ability to find parking within the downtown, both during and after the reconstruction of Lakeshore Road. Staff heard concerns about visitors not knowing where to find parking downtown or that the directions to parking lots was not sufficient.

The Downtown BIA requested signage be erected to direct patrons to the off-street parking areas and non-Lakeshore Road parking spots. They stated directional signage is critical during the construction phases and would be beneficial upon completion of the Lakeshore corridor. Of note, following the Planning and Development Council meeting in July 2014, town staff and the Downtown BIA collaborated to identify opportunities to improve directional signage to parking areas and signs were subsequently installed (2014), providing enhanced direction to on-street and off-street parking opportunities downtown.

Although the initial focus was to provide directions to parking areas, staff saw a larger opportunity to develop a more comprehensive wayfinding system in the downtown that could be geared to various modes of travel and variety of users/audiences, provide navigation to more than parking spaces, and designed to be compatible with the planned streetscape enhancements.

What is 'Wayfinding'?

'Wayfinding' is defined as the process of using spatial and physical information to find our way in the built environment. When people are navigating through a place they may ask themselves questions and face a series of decisions as they make their way to their destination.

An effective wayfinding system will support users by providing them with answers along their journey by providing information that is required, in locations where it is most helpful, clearly articulated, and when they need it. Users typically are visitors, business patrons, residents and employees, whether they arrive to the district via walking, cycling, transit or driving.

Wayfinding elements, when strategically positioned within a larger system, help orient people in unfamiliar environments by providing key visual and navigational information along their paths of travel. The elements typically include landmark buildings and structures, significant natural features, signage, public art installations and street furnishings. These elements, whether considered collectively or individually, are communication tools to facilitate movement, connect places and reinforce identity within the built environment. These elements must be designed for human use and at a human scale.

The objectives of a wayfinding system are to create a distinct visual identity and consistent visual language, to be positioned in the right locations and to integrate with other public realm furnishings, and to reduce signage/messaging clutter. When designing a wayfinding system and its component elements, the following principles and attributes should frame the decision-making: ensuring the system and elements are informative and legible, accessible and inclusive, predictable and intuitive, consistent and comprehensive, coordinated and integrated, and customizable and sustainable.

It is important to note that wayfinding is not a new concept. It is used worldwide as a navigational strategy within the public realm and on large private sites and inside buildings such as university or hospital campus, commercial shopping areas, airports and community uses, like our own QEPPCC.

Support for a Downtown Wayfinding Initiative

The desire for and benefits of a comprehensive wayfinding strategy has been identified and explored through other Town initiatives and studies. These include:

- the 'Livable Oakville Plan' (2009) contains urban design policies (6.2 and 6.3) that require wayfinding in the public realm and streetscapes
- the 'Active Transportation Master Plan (ATMP)' (2017) recommends a formal wayfinding and signing strategy for active transportation routes be developed to assist navigation through town on foot or by bicycle
- the 'Transportation Demand Management Plan' (currently in development) will incorporate a similar recommendation as the ATMP
- the 'Pedestrian Safety Program' (2017) identified wayfinding as a strategy to enhance pedestrian safety
- the 'Livable by Design Manual' (Part A) (2014) contains a section (2.7) under 'Public Realm' that provides design direction for wayfinding objectives, system scope, and typical elements.

Linkage to the Downtown Construction Mitigation Strategy

A temporary wayfinding signage system was identified as one of several mitigation measures for assisting residents, visitors and business patrons during the upcoming Lakeshore Road streetscape reconstruction project. While the genesis was based on consultation feedback requesting signage to direct to parking areas, the scope of the study was expanded to identify other popular destinations and features that residents and visitors can discover and explore.

COMMENT/OPTIONS:**Context**

A wayfinding plan for Downtown Oakville must be compatible and integrated with the streetscape master plan design, with some flexibility to ensure the wayfinding elements are distinctive to the downtown to achieve 'place-making' recognition and will be cohesive with a town-wide wayfinding strategy. The streetscape master plan focuses on increasing patron and visitor connectivity, mobility and accessibility. Wayfinding elements will help to achieve these objectives, while also creating a balance between various transportation mode users, promoting a pedestrian-oriented environment, and integrating heritage conservation objectives.

Developing a successful wayfinding system

The project team considered wayfinding and navigational needs for various users coming to downtown prior to and during the Lakeshore Road corridor construction project, as well as after the construction period and to include the entire downtown.

Prior to construction commencing in early 2019, wayfinding elements and signs may be needed or modified during the conversion of the one-way streets to two-way routes. In addition, there is an opportunity to continue on-site engagement and to test mocked-up signs to get feedback in 2018.

During the two construction phases, temporary wayfinding elements and signs will be installed to provide for predictable and safe movement of residents, patrons, employees and visitors around the downtown. Permanent major wayfinding elements must be installed just prior to finalizing each construction phase in order to minimize any disturbances to the new streetscape surface treatments.

After construction has been completed in late 2020, wayfinding element and signs, whether temporary or permanent, will be installed throughout the remainder of the district to provide information and directions for movement to and through the downtown.

Field inventory

At the outset of the project, an inventory of all signs and street furniture was taken of Lakeshore Road. To get a snapshot of what currently is located within the boulevard, staff documented the type and specific locations of regulatory and non-regulatory signs, all fixed elements and furnishings within the existing streetscape, and any temporary features. Through the inventory, staff recorded: directional/wayfinding signs associated with parking areas and key destinations, regulatory signs (stop signs, one way signs, parking signs), and information signs (street signs). Staff took this opportunity to undertake a comprehensive signage review in the downtown with the goal of reducing sign clutter by removing regulatory/information signs that are no longer required and, where possible, find ways to consolidate the information.

Best practices review

To explore and understand the basics and nuances of wayfinding elements and environmental navigational systems, the project team sought out and undertook the following:

- literature/study review and on-line resource review to collect information on:
 - the spectrum of wayfinding signs and elements
 - the nuances and functions of wayfinding systems
 - what messages/information to be conveyed and how
 - sign and element branding (and consistency with other elements)
 - the lessons learned by other jurisdictions (what to/not to do)
- gathered photos and discussed experiences from interacting with wayfinding elements and systems from their travels locally and internationally. The discussions and materials covered installations discovered within the public realm (streetscapes and open spaces), on private campuses (university and hospital), as well as systems used to navigate within large/complex buildings
- met with consultants from Steer Davies Gleave to discuss the process for wayfinding initiatives and to tour the pilot wayfinding installations located in the Financial District, downtown Toronto.

Initial consultations

Consultations undertaken to date have focused on a series of conversations around the concept of wayfinding, the benefits it can offer the downtown district, the places to find and to be discovered, and the wayfinding elements that might be appropriate for downtown Oakville.

To date, the consultations and conversations included:

- Internal Town departments (Q1 2017): the project team met with representatives from various town departments to introduce the project and to

brainstorm on the intent, scope, timing, logistics, destinations, alignments and challenges associated with developing and delivering a wayfinding system in downtown.

- Intercept surveys (Q2 and Q3 2017): the project team collaborated with the downtown ambassadors by adding four questions to their intercept surveys with residents and visitors to the district. The team saw this as an opportunity to obtain initial feedback and will refresh the questions to be incorporated into the 2018 survey.
- Farmers' Market booth (Q3 2017): the project team invited patrons of the market to view information panels and maps and to leave their comments regarding how they could better navigate to and through downtown, as well as identifying the destinations that can't be missed. (Refer to Appendix A – Information Panels)
- BIA staff (Q3 2017): the project team had conversations with Downtown Oakville staff on wayfinding, including the in-person consultations at the market and on the survey, the destinations to be identified, the content/messaging, the design and branding, coordinating with enhancements at gateways, and potential locations for wayfinding element installations.
- Technology opportunities (Q3 2017): the project team attended a "Vendor Day" of presentations focused on 'smart city' technologies and devices that could be incorporated downtown. Related to wayfinding were presentations and demonstrations on digital information/advertising kiosks and various navigation apps that should be considered in the development of a wayfinding system, either in the initial launch or capable to being included in the future.
- Lakeshore Road Final Design PIC (Q4 2017): the project team, accompanied with the content displayed at the Farmers' Market, attended the public information meeting and provided attendees with greater detail on the wayfinding initiative to be incorporated as a navigational layer of the new streetscape, whether in the form of signage, interactive displays, and/or public art.

Going forward, the project team will continue to undertake consultations to validate the identified destinations and initial signage types and locations and to focus on the signage network, messaging, design, branding, technology enhancements, and implementation.

The project team will reconnect with representatives from the various town departments and advisory committees (specifically, Heritage and Accessibility), reach out to various stakeholder groups and potential partners (including the downtown BIA, property owners, resident associations, and cultural, service and sports groups), and engage with the public (residents and visitors). It is intended that this engagement may take different forms – meetings, workshops, walk-about, surveys, project webpage updates, feedback on temporary installation mock-ups, etc.

Initial direction

Based on the research, fieldwork, and consultations, the project team identified preliminary directions to assist in current and future decision-making on a wayfinding strategy for downtown. While the catalyst for this project was to mitigate impacts of the proposed improvements on Lakeshore Road, the project team broadened the scope to include the entire district so that the navigational elements would provide users with complete messages/directions beyond the Lakeshore corridor.

The project team first identified 'placeholder' locations for future wayfinding element installations along the Lakeshore Road corridor. The intent was to ensure that these spaces are 'reserved', that is, free from other installations, such as street trees and furnishings, and that all the necessary underground utilities would be provided to these locations to avoid digging up the new streetscape surfaces.

The team identified key decision points and places for pausing where wayfinding signage and other significant navigational information should be installed. Three locations within the streetscape renewal project area were reserved where information pillars (totems) could be installed. These somewhat-general locations include the frontage along Towne Square, the south-east corner of Centennial Square, and near the intersection of Lakeshore and Trafalgar Roads. Refer to Appendix B demonstrating these locations mapped on the streetscape masterplan.

In addition to the primary/major wayfinding elements, the project team recognized that additional signage and navigational cues would be required to supplement and reinforce the primary information provided. The team explored utilizing 'finger post' directional signage, consistent destination signage and digital media as ways to communicate directions and information. Refer to Appendix C for an example of a typical suite of wayfinding signs/elements from another jurisdiction. Of note, the project team deems the illustrated 'context totem' or 'info-to-go pillars' as precedents for the information pillar and 'directional' as a precedent for the finger posts signs being considered for downtown.

Next steps

The project team has identified the key destinations, the decision points and the general locations for the three wayfinding information pillars. The following next steps are required:

1. Final location details for Lakeshore Road will be confirmed in time for the Lakeshore Road Streetscape and Reconstruction tender later this fall.
2. Public/stakeholder consultations will be scheduled regarding the design and parameters of the information pillars and directional signs.
3. Development of temporary full-scale mock-ups of the wayfinding elements.
4. Investigation of the timelines and costs associated with design for production, fabrication, installation and maintenance of these pillars.
5. Development of implementation plan

CONSIDERATIONS:**(A) PUBLIC**

Initial public engagement related to wayfinding strategies and elements took place in 2017 through the intercept surveys by the Downtown Ambassadors and through conversations with staff at the Farmers' Market. Focused consultations on the wayfinding strategy for downtown will continue throughout the next steps of this project progress.

(B) FINANCIAL

There are no financial implications associated with the recommendations of this report; costs associated with design of wayfinding elements and installation of temporary or permanent features on other streets will be subject to a future budget request. Construction of the wayfinding elements will be included in the construction cost for Lakeshore Road. Funding is in place for complementary wayfinding elements associated with on- and off-street parking in the downtown district.

(C) IMPACT ON OTHER DEPARTMENTS & USERS

Development, design and implementation of the wayfinding initiative will involve multiple departments including Engineering and Construction, Planning Services, Recreation and Culture, Parks and Open Space, Economic Development, Roads and Works Operations, and Municipal Enforcement Services.

(D) CORPORATE AND/OR DEPARTMENT STRATEGIC GOALS

This report addresses the corporate strategic goal to:

- enhance our economic environment
- continuously improve our programs and services
- provide outstanding service to our residents and businesses
- enhance our cultural environment
- enhance our social environment
- be the most livable town in Canada

(E) COMMUNITY SUSTAINABILITY

The work completed to date and next steps in developing a wayfinding plan for Downtown Oakville complies with the sustainability objectives of the *Livable Oakville Plan*.

APPENDICES:

APPENDIX A Information Panels used at Downtown Oakville Farmers' Market (2017)

APPENDIX B Map of Downtown Oakville with possible locations for primary wayfinding elements

APPENDIX C Precedent images of a typical wayfinding system, including primary and secondary directional and information signs

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