



Deputation to City of Toronto, Scarborough Community Council – May 18th, 2021

Re: SC24.17 – Engaging Scarborough Councillors and Businesses in Economic Development Initiatives

From: Larry Whatmore, President, Scarborough Community Renewal Organization

Members of Scarborough Community Council:

Good morning. My name is Larry Whatmore. I am the president of the Scarborough Community Renewal Organization. SCRO is an organization of engaged volunteers that works to connect, promote and renew Scarborough, so Scarborough can be strong and prosperous.

I know I am speaking to an audience that shares this objective. Over the past year, SCRO has met with all of you to discuss how we can improve Scarborough's economic prosperity. We have worked with Deputy Mayor Thompson to ensure that opportunities for economic prosperity enabled by the Eglinton East LRT are embedded into the Golden Mile Secondary Plan, as much as possible. And we enjoy a close working relationship with your Scarborough-facing staff, who also work closely with our colleagues at the Scarborough Business Association. In short, creating economic prosperity in Scarborough requires all hands on deck: political leadership, dedicated staff, and connections to community leaders through organizations like SCRO, to promote a coordinated approach to economic prosperity in Scarborough.

The City's economic development strategy takes a city-wide approach, to make Toronto a place where businesses can thrive. However, Toronto has many distinctive commercial districts with different strengths, weaknesses, threats, and opportunities. The issues in the financial district are very different from those of the airport district or from those of mid-Scarborough. That's why Deputy Mayor Thompson ensured that the Toronto Region Board of Trade's "Ready for Reopening" project included a Scarborough Centre planning table. Because one size does not fit all.

The need to plan for a post-COVID recovery is urgent and is therefore our top priority.

But we also believe that Toronto's economic development strategy needs to look beyond COVID, to develop a business development and retention strategy that leverages the strengths and opportunities that Scarborough offers and addresses infrastructure weaknesses and threats posed by evolving business models and the need to compete with other jurisdictions.

More specifically, we suggest:

1. A Scarborough Economic Action Plan to guide not just a post-COVID recovery but also a longer term strategy that leverages Scarborough's cultural diversity, protects employment lands, and creates a broad range of new business and employment opportunities as Scarborough expands and gentrifies along its avenues.
2. Engagement of Scarborough business leaders in the creation of recovery plans, such as the Shop Local campaign, and in the development of a Scarborough-oriented economic action plan.

3. Collaboration with Scarborough stakeholders and thought leaders to address Toronto-wide initiatives that don't work as well in a suburban context, such as BIAs and CaféTO. These are great programs for main street retail but they have been less effective in Scarborough. I don't have a solution to offer but we need to put many minds together to identify solutions that will be more effective in a Scarborough context.
4. Tracking and reporting of business and economic conditions in Scarborough. It's hard to know how well we're doing without good data. For example, the Toronto Employment Survey does a good job of documenting activity in Scarborough Centre but very little about activity elsewhere in Scarborough.
5. Developing a strategy to protect and promote retail and restaurant businesses in Scarborough. Scarborough has many such businesses which are often owned by aspiring newcomers. Those businesses breathe significant cultural life into Scarborough. It will be important to protect and preserve retail-focused employment nodes in Scarborough.

Thank you for this opportunity to speak and happy to take any questions.

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