



The Future of Islington Village's **RETAIL MAIN STREET**

A Community Engagement Report

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AUTHORED ON BEHALF OF THE ISLINGTON RATEPAYERS &
RESIDENTS ASSOCIATION

A. Why This, Why Now?

“Main Street retail is the centre of **employment, economic activity, and cultural expression and diversity**, and are integral to the well-being and the prosperity of the city and local neighbourhoods they serve.” (Toronto Retail Guideline, 2019)

The Village of Islington, first settled in 1808, has long been identified by the city as the heart and soul of Etobicoke Centre. Until recently, Dundas Street West between Islington and Kipling Avenues, was considered an historical Ontario Main Street shopping area within the GTA. As recently as 2011, streetscape plans designated this corridor with Complete Community elements that distinctly marked it as a self-contained historical village, as did the Etobicoke Centre Secondary Plan (2015).



But of late the historic Village of Islington Main Street has been overlooked in the redevelopment of Etobicoke Centre. **A welcoming Main Street with distinct character, pedestrian and family-friendly features where retail thrives, is critical to achieving a Complete Community.** This supports Major Transit Station Areas (MTSA) urban intensification, the Etobicoke Civic Centre (ECC), Housing Now, and high-rise development along Dundas Street.

WE SEE THE OPPORTUNITY to strengthen the Village’s retail area by encouraging character-sensitive, community-focused design that defines and enhances the Main Street as a thriving retail hub to the City’s abutting initiatives; the third prong of the ECC service & program hub and Housing Now mixed-use residential hub.

OUR GOAL is to ensure all stakeholders have a **cohesive, consistent vision** for the redevelopment of Islington Village Main Street, with the City’s best practices for Streetscapes, Main Streets, Growing Up, Retail Guidelines and Complete Communities concepts as their north star.

We believe that even *small ideas* can garner a *big, long-term impact*.

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Association – Retail Development Working
Group (<https://irra.ca/>)

B. The Voice of the Community

In the Fall of 2023, we canvassed the community to gather ideas about our Main Street. We leveraged community stakeholders (BIA, IRRRA, City Councillors' offices, Arts Etobicoke, MABELLEarts, Eatonville Residents Association and local churches) to help distribute the survey. (Appendix A)

- Resident Retail Survey N=270 (See Appendix A for the original survey)
- One-on-one discussions with local businesses, and discussions with the local BIA
- Participation in city and community web meetings

Reviewing the survey results, along with the insights gained from community business discussions and community webinars, 6 overarching themes were clear:

- 1) **Revitalizing our Main Street** – *I want to walk to shop in “my” Village*
- 2) **The Joy of Strolling** – *Residents seek a pedestrian-friendly retail street, surrounded by beauty*
- 3) **Welcoming Stores** – *Family-friendly, inviting, clean and relevant for everyday living*
- 4) **Building Retail to “Feed the Soul”** – *Sociability of bakeries, cafés, restaurants, diners*
- 5) **Safe and Easy to Get About** – *Accessing amenities through all modes of travel*
- 6) **Fear of a Traffic Corridor** – *Investing in the future of the Village, safe for all*

Theme 1) Revitalizing Our Main Street

Residents recognize that the Village has lost its cohesive feel, and its desirability as an historic Main Street . The community densification is an opportunity to take stock of what is important and advocate for what will help it thrive as a distinct, walkable retail destination.

WHAT'S DESIRED

“Keep the village atmosphere”

”Keep the feel of a main street. Retain historical features.”

“Encourage ground floor spaces to be open to the street - many are closed off making it feel less safe”

“We need practical stores, nice cafes to encourage people to visit and shop”

“We need grocery stores and community centres that are easily accessible and not in some condo...with a second story presence.”

WHAT'S BROKEN

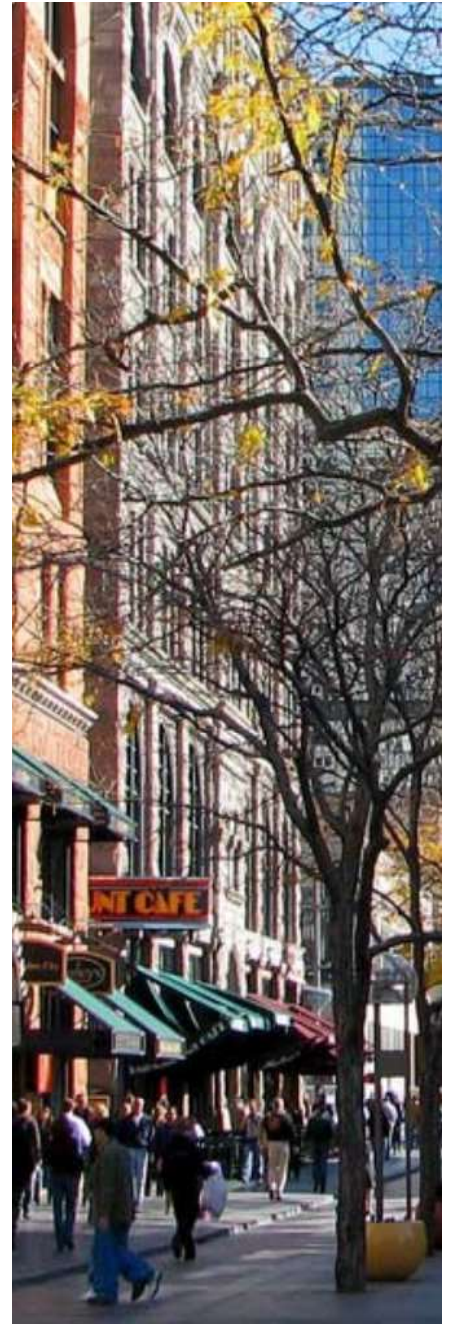
“Lacking many daily life amenities, - with a redundancy in certain services”

“There is no pedestrian draw - you go to drug store and leave”

“An increasingly disjointed feel from east to west along Dundas and between the north and south side of the street”

“All our history is being removed”

“Even though there are some solid businesses it looks motley and patched together and some look super sketchy”

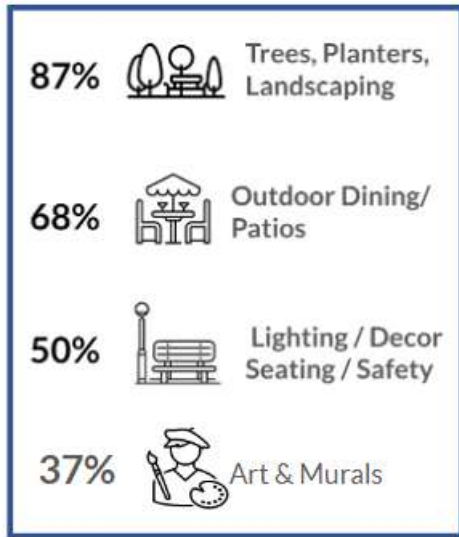


THEME 2) The Joy of Strolling

Residents of every age seek a pedestrian-friendly Main Street surrounded by beauty – for strolling, people watching, browsing, and feeling renewed!



WHICH AMENITIES?...



WHAT'S DESIRED

"Area needs an uplift to draw more pedestrian traffic"

"It would be great if it was more foot traffic friendly"

SPECIFICALLY, MORE GREEN SPACES....

"Our community desperately needs beautiful places to walk to and bike to with greenery (including evergreen trees)"

"Large swaths of concrete overwhelm limited green spaces. More green space needed - trees, seats, fountain etc"

"Keep the old trees, all the trees, plant more trees, provide park space for people and separate park space for animals"

GREEN SPACES...WITH INTERESTING FEATURES

"A Village Landmark"

"Space for music and art installations"

"We need outdoor seating and squares"

"We need a European piazza square or narrow streets with small whimsical businesses"



THEME 3) Welcoming Stores

It is important to many that stores need to appeal to young people and are family-friendly. This translates to being inviting, clean, and relevant businesses.

FAMILY-FRIENDLY

“There is a real opportunity here to make Islington Village an amazing area that hopefully caters to the family unit”

“It would be lovely if there were more places to gather groups of friends & neighbours that were family friendly”

“I love the village. We just need more things for kids to do”

RELEVANT BUSINESSES

“I really like smaller well-run businesses like bakeries, delis fruit and vegetable stores”

“As someone in their early 30’s, there is nothing that this strip brings to the table. Limited cafes/bakeries, or vibrant businesses...”

“It would be great if there was an eclectic mix of shops and restaurants available. Like Roncesvalles.”

MAKE MORE INVITING

“Many of the shops in the area are run down or unappealing look of the building’s exterior”

“... we need to work on keeping the place clean.”

“Many [stores] have their backs to the street” (windows covered)

“Cluttered windows, cutting out pedestrian interest”

WHAT DETERS FROM SHOPPING?



THEME 4) Retail to “Feed the Soul”

The sociability of bakeries, cafes, restaurants, and family diners brings the community together. Retail that offers opportunities to “meet up”, gather and connect with neighbours and friends is the number 1 desire and almost unanimously sought by all.

COFFEE SHOPS

“A place to sit to have coffee”

“The area is in desperate need of a good coffee shop!”

BUSINESSES WANTED...



CAFES/BAKERIES

“We need places to meet, like unique cafes”

“My wish is for a bakery/coffee/lunch spot”

“A bakery cafe with lots of seating would be nice”

RESTAURANTS...WITH OUTDOOR SEATING

“It’s sad seeing all amenities disappear, like St James Gate Pub”

“I like the outdoor patio idea, but not next to the traffic fumes and noise.”

“An elevated patio or one set back with adjacent trees would pleasant”



THEME 5) Safe and Easy to Get About

Residents may differ on convenient and safe mobility, but accessible “parking” is desired by both bikers and drivers.

IN FAVOUR OF BIKE LANES

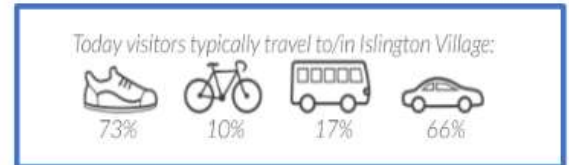
“Bike lanes are needed on Dundas St W”

“I would bike in the area, but it is busy and there’s no bike lanes”

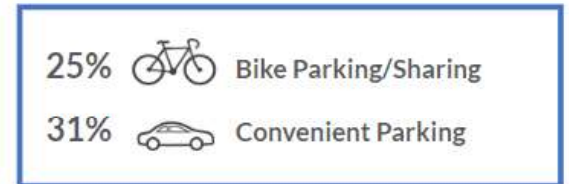
“More cycling options means fewer cars and a more pleasant experience”

“I’m absolutely begging for the city to put in a bike lane. There are so many kids in the complex at Michael Power. A lack of safe cycling options means that those of us who come to Islington Village typically have to drive.”

“Consider more bike stands”



DESIRE....



IN FAVOUR OF CAR PARKING

“No Bike lanes ...like Bloor at Jane St”

“Remember many of us have disabilities or are aging. We cannot walk far or ride a bike.”

“I have mobility issues -- parking & good sidewalk access to stores is very important for seniors. This community has many people who would benefit from easier access”

“Plenty of parking free and low cost are ideal”

“It will never be a good destination shopping or dining area until it has car parking available”.



THEME 6) Fear of a Traffic Corridor

Residents don't feel the City is being forthright in how the Village fits into the area's larger densification initiatives. To many, growth means more traffic and noise and a fear it could eradicate all that is good about the village, and make it unsafe and unappealing to visit or live nearby.

COMMUNITY FEARS

"If the Etobicoke Civic Centre still plans on relocating to this area – which I'm sure it will, it is bound to bring more car traffic"

"I hope that city planners seriously consider the size and density of future development and how it will impact our infrastructure, traffic and community safety"

"There is a high concentration of roads, intersections and traffic in the area that seem to be passing through on to other destinations"

"Traffic will be a huge problem when all the condos/apartments are built. There needs to be additional parking"

"Excessive noise from speeding cars, car mufflers and revving motorcycles should be clamped down on. There are noise by-laws that are not being enforced"

"I am concerned about the traffic congestion resulting from densification and hope to see clean sight lines and safety as a priority"

"The traffic through the village is increasingly horrendous, noisy and spewing noxious fumes. It's not conducive to eating on patios or visiting shops."



C. Addressing the Community’s Needs using City Guidelines & Best Practices

The following is a compilation of recommendations to address each of the six 0core themes, supported by City of Toronto Guidelines and research.

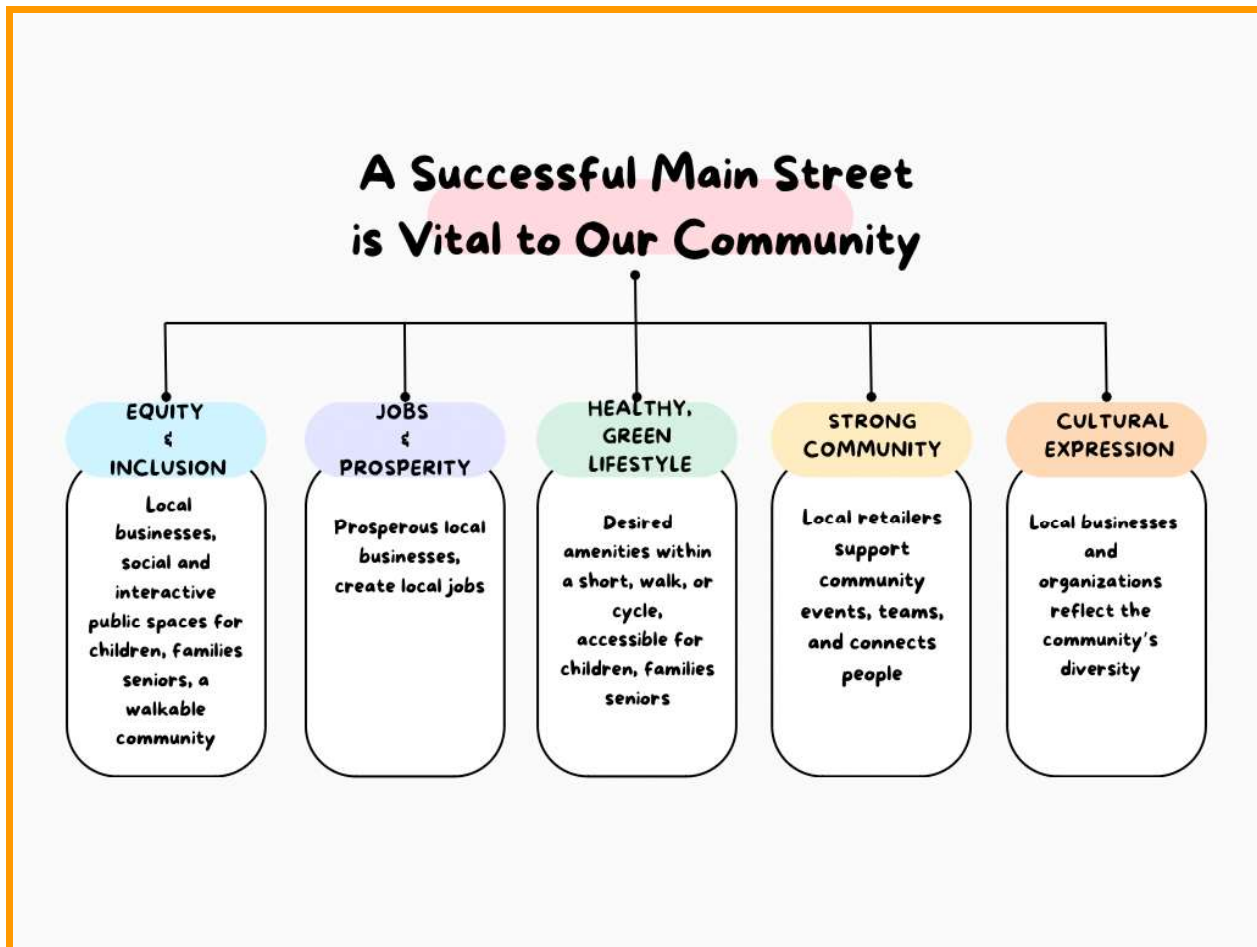
Community Survey Themes	Committee Recommendations	Supporting City Guidelines & Research
<p>1) Revitalizing our Main Street</p> <p><i>Design a cohesive streetscape and retail environment, communicating a sense of place.</i></p>	<p>Reinforce Village /Main Street character:</p> <p>Marking entry to the Village through landmarks or signage with cohesive elements along Main Street.</p> <p>Create a space where people gather through statement features such as a fountain and interactive art.</p> <p>Incorporate distinctive historical architectural elements for street level retail frontage – window design, materials such as brick, stone, and wood, to reflect Main Street character of small, independent businesses. Appendix D Inspiration Images of Local Architecture</p> <p>Support local businesses through small business advocacy, funding access and information sharing. Current Financial Resources Appendix C</p>	<p>Retail Main Streets Study (2020)</p> <p>Streetscape Manual User Guide (2019)</p> <p>Growing UP: Planning For Children in New Vertical Communities (2020)</p> <p>Etobicoke Centre Public Space and Streetscape Plan (2011)</p> <p>Retail Design Manual (2020)</p> <p>Etobicoke Centre Secondary Plan, 2023</p> <p>Toronto Official Plan, 2023</p>
<p>2) The Joy of Strolling</p> <p><i>Create a safe and appealing zone for</i></p>	<p>Wide sidewalks and boulevard space for pedestrians to move and linger.</p> <p>Well-lit pathways, entrances and window displays to mark safe and desirable pedestrian destinations, day or night.</p>	<p>Toronto’s Complete Street Guidelines (2019)</p> <p>Growing UP: Planning for Children in New Vertical Communities (2020)</p>

Community Survey Themes	Committee Recommendations	Supporting City Guidelines & Research
<p><i>walking, shopping and stopping.</i></p>	<p>Preserve and expand green landscaping using raised beds, year-round evergreens, all-season planters, raised beds, tree lined pathways, and lights on trees.</p> <p>Add parkettes with overhead protection and seating for people to sit, relax, and enjoy the main street.</p> <p>Enhance local identity through banners, whimsical art, seasonal lighting, and decorative paving.</p>	<p>Toronto Vibrant Streets Guide (2012)</p>
<p>3) Welcoming Stores & Streets</p> <p>&</p> <p>4) Building Retail to “Feed the Soul”</p> <p><i>Support businesses that serve the community on foot, and attract visitors.</i></p>	<p>Incorporate small retail shops at street level, with reconfigurable walls, to attract a variety of established and independent businesses to serve daily needs (healthy and affordable food outlets, pharmacies, convenient stores, eateries)</p> <p>Building setbacks & designated sidewalk space for shops and eateries to spill into public space - sidewalk sales, green grocer stands, patios.</p> <p>Street level frontage designed with prominent window displays, hanging baskets, seasonal planters and signage to attract attention/draw visitors.</p> <p>Built in awnings, overhangs, plantings and street furniture to create sheltered, family-friendly eating, drinking and socializing.</p> <p>Clear glass to provide eyes on the street, limiting high-level graphics that obstruct windows.</p>	

Community Survey Themes	Committee Recommendations	Supporting City Guidelines & Research
<p>5) Safe and Easy to Get About</p> <p>&</p> <p>6) Fear of a Traffic Corridor</p> <p><i>Ensure the Village is easy and safe to get about: Multi-modal access to the Village, not just a traffic corridor.</i></p>	<p>Gateway landmarks to signal drivers are entering a busy Main Street.</p> <p>Traffic calming measures such as street parking, crosswalks and traffic lights, curb extensions and bump outs to reduce traffic speed and noise, and secondarily to increase parking.</p> <p>Safety features for children, pedestrians & cyclists, including wider/shorter intersections, bike lane markings, extended curbs, curb ramps for accessibility, planters and street furniture.</p> <p>Build family-friendly pedestrian/bicycle path(s) linking Michael Power Park, Mabelle and Islington Community School.</p> <p>More prominent signage for public parking, TTC, shelters, bike racks and future bike share.</p> <p>Preserve neighbourhood street parking to ensure retail success. See current parking restrictions map Appendix B.</p>	<p>Neighbourhood Streets Plan</p> <p>Toronto Streetscape Manual (2019)</p>

D. Our Vision

To reclaim the Village of Islington’s Main Street as a thriving, welcoming retail area with distinct character, one where people come to visit, explore, socialize, and experience the Village’s amenities and leave with the intention to come again. Leading to a Complete Community!



E. APPENDIX

A) Islington Village Retail Survey Backgrounder

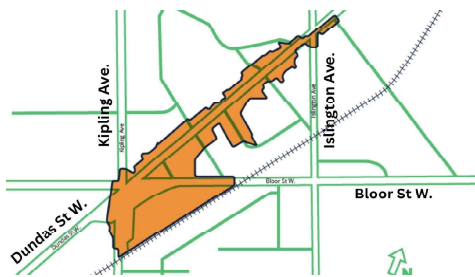
In the Fall of 2023 this Working Group published the following survey to garner community feedback. Posters were put up in various locations in Islington Village and the survey was published in the Business Improvement Area (BIA) Newspaper, the BIA website, Councillors Amber Morley’s and Stephen Holyday’s website, and was promoted by the Islington Ratepayers and Residents Association (IRRA) on their website and newsletters to IRRA members. Additionally we contacted community stakeholders and asked that they promote the survey with their community; Local churches, MABELLEarts, & Arts Etobicoke. The following details both the survey followed by a highlightsshort summary of key results:

Islington Village Retail Survey – September 2023

The following is the original survey content distributed to the community in September 2023, on behalf of the Islington Ratepayers and Residents Association (IRRA).

Survey Link: <https://forms.gle/2AYr43r9DZMF4X1U8>

Islington Village Retail Development Survey



Over the next several years, Islington Village will be undergoing extensive redevelopment.

Islington Village is located along Dundas Street from Islington Avenue to Kipling Avenue and south to Bloor Street (see image).

Share your voice to shape the future of Islington Village!

Your thoughts, insights, and suggestions captured in this survey are very important to help the **Islington Ratepayers and Residents Association (IRRA)** represent you and communicate our community’s voice with developers, politicians and the Islington Business Improvement Association.

We are genuinely interested in hearing about community strengths and needs. Please note that this is a safe environment in which to provide candid and authentic feedback.

We invite you to complete the survey below and send it to 3 (or more!) neighbours – the more voices, the better we can influence our community’s future! It will take less than 5 minutes to complete. **The survey closes October 2023.**

- Start of Survey -

1. What types of businesses do you like to see in the Islington Village area? Select all responses that apply.

- Apparel and Accessories
- Bakeries
- Beauty and Aesthetics (i.e. salons, spas, barbers, studios)
- Cafes
- Childcare, Education and Tutoring
- Community Clubs and Groups
- Convenience Stores
- Decor, Home Improvements and Hardware
- Electronics (cell phones, computers, electronic repair)
- Fitness (gym, yoga, Pilates, athletics)
- Flowers, Party Supplies and Gifts
- Grocery Stores
- Health and Wellness (pharmacies , doctors, therapies)
- Miscellaneous Retailers (Please specify:_____)
- Restaurants and Pubs
- Other (Please specify:_____)

2. Great main streets have great amenities! What amenities would you like to see more of in Islington Village? Select your top 3 responses.

- Bike Shares and Bike Parking
- Decorative Features such as, Lighting and Fountains
- Outdoor Dining/Patios
- Public Art such as Murals, Sculpture, Installations
- Street seating & Public Gathering Areas
- Trees, Planters, Landscaping and Green Space
- Other...

3. How do you typically travel to/ in Islington Village? Select up to 2 responses.

- Bicycle
- Car
- Public Transit
- Rideshare/Taxi
- Walk

4. If you do not shop often in Islington Village, what deters you?
Select up to 3 responses that are most relevant to you.
Select 'Not Applicable' if this question does not pertain to you.

- I am unaware of the shops that are available
- I don't feel safe in the area
- There is a lack of parking
- The retail shops or businesses do not meet my needs
- There is too much traffic and noise
- It is an unpleasant pedestrian experience
- Not Applicable
- Other...

Please share any additional comments, thoughts or suggestions about Islington Village. You may also use this space to elaborate on any of your responses to the above questions. _____

To help us better understand our survey results, please indicate your postal code: _____

If you have any questions or experience challenges accessing and submitting this survey, please notify us at islingtonndg@gmail.com. To amplify our community voice, we invite you to send this survey to 3 or more neighbours, friends, and Islington Village Residents.

Please visit the [Islington Ratepayers and Residents Association](https://www.islingtonratepayersandresidentsassociation.com) website to stay informed or get involved directly. Thank you for taking a few minutes to help us better understand our community!

- End of Survey -

Islington Village – Retail Development Survey – Highlights



Respondents from the Islington Village Area

270+

October 2023

Today visitors typically travel to/in Islington Village:



WHAT RESIDENTS WANT:

BUSINESSES



AMENITIES



WHAT RESIDENTS SAID:

“Islington Village is all about the local use of the spaces, and needs to be focused first and foremost for the residents that live there. It is already centrally located with good bus and subway access.”

We need some practical stores, nice cafes to encourage people to visit and shop. A variety of stores will increase foot traffic and develop a community atmosphere.

There is a real opportunity here to make Islington Village an amazing area that hopefully caters to the family unit.

More pedestrian safe areas, interesting stops on the way, affordable, interesting shops and restaurants.

It will never be a good destination shopping or dining area until it has car parking available.

I hope city planners seriously consider the size and density of future development and how it will impact our infrastructure, traffic and community safety.

“Retail Main Streets are centres of employment, economic activity, culture expression and social diversity, and are integral to the well-being and prosperity of the city and the local neighbourhoods they serve.” – Retail Main Streets Study, City of Toronto, Jan. 2020

B) Parking Map and Restrictions in Village of Islington



C) Financial Resources: Business Grants, Incentives and Rebates

Funding need not be an excuse for making this vision a reality. Several city of Toronto funding programs exist for BIAs, businesses and community organizations and were referenced in the creation of this report:

- Bringing Back Main Street, Canadian Urban Institute
 - <https://bringbackmainstreet.org/>
- Streetscape Improvement Program-BIA
 - <https://www.toronto.ca/business-economy/business-operation-growth/business-improvement-areas/bia-financial-incentives/streetscape-improvement-program/>
- Main Street Innovation Fund
 - <https://www.toronto.ca/business-economy/business-operation-growth/business-incentives/main-street-innovation-fund/>
- Commercial Facade Improvement Grants
 - <https://www.toronto.ca/business-economy/business-operation-growth/business-incentives/commercial-facade-improvement/>
- Toronto Main Street Recovery and Rebuild Initiatives
 - <https://www.toronto.ca/business-economy/business-operation-growth/business-incentives/toronto-main-street-recovery-and-rebuild-initiative/>
- Streetscape Master Plan Program
 - <https://www.toronto.ca/business-economy/business-operation-growth/business-improvement-areas/bia-financial-incentives/mural-street-art-apc>