

Church Wellesley Neighbourhood Vision

- 1. A great Yonge Street**
- 2. Vibrant urban village**
- 3. Strong connections**
- 4. Solid infrastructure**
- 5. Healthy social fabric**

1. Yonge Street should join the ranks of the world's great streets. It has the history. It has the mind share. It has the social role. It has the commercial value. All of these factors should be harnessed to reinvigorate and reinvent Yonge Street.

2. The Church Street commercial strip and the adjacent residential areas already feel like an urban village. We need to do more to celebrate our place. We need to establish zoning that will protect and strengthen our urban village.

3. Our vision includes multiple, open, and inviting connections between a Great Yonge Street and a vibrant Church Wellesley urban village. Trees, greenery, and patios invite Yonge Street pedestrians into our urban village.

4. The number of people and businesses using our neighbourhood continues to increase. We believe that the physical and services infrastructure needs to increase in fair proportion to this increase in people and business.

5. We want the social fabric of the neighbourhood to be healthy, diverse, safe, open and inviting. The places and spaces in our neighbourhood should be right for people and support healthy use. People should feel they belong.

NOTE: These elements of our vision are offered as a common starting point for neighbourhood stakeholders. Relative importance will be vary. But starting from a common base, we should at least be able to discuss possible trade-offs. The pages which follow provide elaboration and background information about our five shared vision elements.

A great Yonge Street

I. Historical & Social Presence

Most great streets have a storied past. They're notable for what they have been, and for what they are. They are also notable for their presence in the public mind. People recognize great streets as “important”.

II. The Social & Built Reality

1. **Walkable:** It's possible to walk with leisure. People are present in sufficient numbers for safety, but with enough space that you can walk at your own pace.
2. **Defined:** The street “walls” have been well-defined. Buildings don't loom over the street, but they do provide a consistent definition.
3. **Variety:** The street engages the eye. There is a rich variety of textures, patterns, and shapes along the street. Many store fronts are relatively narrow.
4. **Design:** The design of buildings is complementary. The buildings “work” with each other, there is an overall coherence to the street.
5. **Quality:** Construction materials are generally of high quality. The buildings show that care was taken to use good quality materials.
6. **Green:** There is a substantial “green” presence along the street and at the entrance of side streets. Trees, plantings, and hanging baskets are used.
7. **Diverse:** There is a rich retail and recreational diversity. There are different kinds of shops and different kinds of recreation available along the street.
8. **Details:** The street features great “details”. It might be a great door, or a great window, or a great bench. Great features stand out in positive ways.
9. **Places:** There are recognized “places” along the street and adjacent to the street. These places are destinations where you want to spend time.

Not everyone would agree about exactly what makes a great street. But there are features that can be identified as common to most great streets.

Comment on Yonge Street (between Dundas & Bloor)

Yonge Street has the historical and social presence. Its built form may have been somewhat neglected, with the occasional inappropriate newer building, but the street's “bones” are good. It should be revitalized. And the adjacent laneways provide a rich opportunity for alternative retail presence. The cost for new construction on or near our Great Yonge Street should include a significant contribution towards improving the great character of the street. There's no good reason why we can't make it happen.

Vibrant urban village

The urban village has been a subject for discussion for over a century. People want both the local connections that are present in a village, and the excitement and diversity of an urban centre. The urban village held out the promise of both.

Five characteristics stand out as particularly important to Church Wellesley being seen as an urban village:

- ⤴ **Commercial Centre** – There is a clearly recognized commercial heart of the urban village. The village has its own “centre of town”.
- ⤴ **Multipurpose** – People turn to the urban village to meet multiple needs. It's not just a place to do any one thing. It's multipurpose.
- ⤴ **Human Scale** – The defining built elements are at human scale. Most are one, two, three, or four storey.
- ⤴ **Open Space** – The open spaces in private and public lands mean that people don't feel hemmed in or confined.
- ⤴ **Local Places** – There are recognized places within the urban village that have a shared importance for villagers.

Church Wellesley should be more than just an urban village, it should be a *vibrant* urban village. Each of the five defining characteristics should be reinforced and strengthened by actual and anticipated changes.

- ⤴ The businesses in the heart of the village should enjoy steadily improving commercial success.
- ⤴ Villagers should turn to their village for an increasing range of activities. The range of available activities should be increasing.
- ⤴ The newly built defining elements should reinforce the human scale. The public, defining face should be of limited height and scale.
- ⤴ Responsible new developments should be encouraged, with every effort being made to maintain the “public” open space.
- ⤴ There should be a continuing effort to identify and enhance places that are and will be important for villagers.

These internal characteristics are the ones of greatest importance to Church Wellesley as a vibrant urban village. But our urban village is also a part of the larger urban centre of Toronto. That context and our connections to it are also important.

Strong connections

The connections in a greater urban area provide important defining context for the local areas within the greater area. A neighbourhood's essence is not just what is found within the neighbourhood's boundaries, but it's also coloured by the connections between the neighbourhood and the rest of the city.

Connections take a number of different forms:

- ⤴ **Pedestrian** – The walking connections between a neighbourhood and everywhere else is perhaps the most important set of connections.
- ⤴ **Transit** – The transit connections from the neighbourhood to elsewhere are also important, but may have less of an emotional impact.

- ⤴ **Vehicle** – We still see the automobile as an important way to get elsewhere. That's not universally true, but it's widely accepted.
- ⤴ **Social** – Social groups within the neighbourhood can connect outside the neighbourhood to other groups.

The connections of most immediate concern are the number, nature, and character of the pedestrian connections. Church Wellesley is indeed fortunate to have some 15 outdoor patios on the side streets that connect our neighbourhood to the Yonge Street pedestrian corridor. These connections open our neighbourhood to the sea of humanity that flows along Yonge Street. And as Yonge Street moves towards becoming a great street, these street level connections will take on even greater importance.

The transit and vehicle connections are important, but largely outside the hands of the neighbourhood. The social connections are not outside our hands. We need to reach out to other social groups, to local business improvement associations, to other neighbourhood associations, and to social and support groups throughout the metropolitan area.

Solid infrastructure

Life in our neighbourhood is made possible and supported by a number of public spaces, public services, and utilities. We have only a modest number of public spaces and parks. The current neighbourhood population is underserved. While there are ambitious plans to increase our population, there are few corresponding plans to increase public spaces and parks.

We are fortunate to be served by the Yonge Street subway line, but it can already be difficult to get on subway cars during rush hours. As our population increases, that's going to become a more serious problem. And there seems to be little willingness to increase public transit capital expenditures to match the population increase that will necessarily accompany new building permits.

There have been some early warning signs that our utilities can be overloaded. Investments in utilities have even less visibility than investments in public transit. The neighbourhood needs to maintain a watching brief on peak capacities of the utilities serving our area, and work to ensure that peak capacities increase to match authorized population increases.

Healthy social fabric

The social fabric of the neighbourhood should provide an environment that is:

- ⤴ **Safe**
- ⤴ **Open**
- ⤴ **Inviting**
- ⤴ **Supportive**

- ▲ **Connected**
- ▲ **Diverse**

Safe comes first because safety is *the* critical characteristics of the neighbourhood. If people don't feel safe, very little healthy social activity is possible. And safety needs to be a concern of the entire neighbourhood.

Open means that the neighbourhood accepts all kinds of people. This certainly requires tolerance, but it should go beyond tolerating differences. There should be a genuine openness in the neighbourhood.

Inviting means that the neighbourhood actively welcomes new people into the neighbourhood. Historically, Church Wellesley has been inviting to members of the LGBTQ social group. This must continue. But our neighbourhood is also home to students, seniors, and young families. We should do more to invite members of diverse social groups into our neighbourhood.

Supportive means that we provide support for residents on an on-going basis. Support services for members of the LGBTQ social group are available. This must continue. But we should do more to provide support for members of other social groups.

Connected means that active social connection between different social groups are supported. We don't force connections, but should encourage them when they benefit all parties. In particular, we should do more to connect with the transient population that can seek sanctuary in our neighbourhood.

Diverse recognizes that our safe, open, inviting, supportive social fabric will also encourage social diversity. We should not discourage this, but rather celebrate it.

The concern for our social fabric takes on greater importance as more of our residents move into high rise towers. The placeless character of high rise living can provide a welcomed anonymity, but it can also deliver an unwelcomed isolation. We can and should work to overcome that isolation. Church Wellesley can and should be safe, open, inviting, supportive, connected, and diverse.

Selected References

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