

# RATIONALE TO KEEP BILLBOARD TAX REVENUE ALLOTTED TO ENHANCING PUBLIC SPACES WITH ART



## BACKGROUND

*BeautifulCity.ca first introduced the idea of a tax on billboards to enhance public spaces via art in 2002/3 during the Creative City Consultations. Since then, over 3500 people have signed a petition in support, over 50 organizations from across Toronto endorse it, and according to Environics 7/10 Toronto voters are in favour. In 2007, Executive Committee directed staff to report on a billboard tax to raise revenue to enhance funding for arts and culture / enforcement. This city building idea has been singled out in multiple staff reports as achieving a broad spectrum of public support and as the most popular in the Revenue Tools Consultations. On Nov. 4<sup>th</sup> 2009 the billboard tax to fund art and enforcement was unanimously passed by PGM Committee with all further amendments to occur at Nov. 30 / Dec. 1 Council.*

## CURRENT POSITION

BeautifulCity.ca supports the current billboard by-law and allotment to create a dedicated enforcement unit. Additionally, endorses the concept of a depoliticized / quazi-judicial variance process for approving new billboards. (Something the billboard industry also wants). However, the tax amount is in danger of being pushed down to a level that does not adequately compensate Torontonians. The language of where the revenue should go has also been weakened from the original intent.

## 1) A PUBLIC GOOD WITH WIDE GEOGRAPHIC AND SECTORAL SUPPORT

Enhanced funding to art in public spaces (murals, accessible programming, free festivals, outdoor performances etc.) will provide a wide public benefit to all Torontonians. Further so in that BeautifulCity.ca policy includes a funding formula that will benefit all city wards and put a priority on youth art and high-need communities. The proposed use of revenue towards supporting the arts in public spaces is also endorsed by some of the top environmental, sustainable transport, cultural and poverty reduction organizations in Toronto as well as groups located across the city.

## 2) FIX MARKET FAILURE, ENHANCE ACCESS AND FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

Almost all other forms of advertising subsidize cultural content in exchange for your attention (e.g. TV includes 45 minutes of educational or entertaining content in exchange for 15 minutes of advertising, newspapers about 50/50.) Billboards do not have to give back a broader public good as people don't have a choice in viewing the messages. Billboards provide one of the cheapest, per-view forms of advertising. The 'cost' is passed on to public spaces, the look of our city and in undermining more democratic media. The billboard tax for art is a fair and just means for outdoor advertisers to take responsibility for their impact on the city and enhance freedom of expression.

## 3) BOLSTER THE CITY'S ECONOMY

According to the Martin Prosperity Institute, directed investment in arts and culture dramatically improves economic competitiveness, impacting innovation, creativity and producing a more vibrant city. However, in 2008, the Institute found that "the fact that average cities around the country have expanded their cultural expenditures by more than 4 times as much as the City of Toronto has put Toronto on the low end of competitive growth."

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## BEAUTIFULCITY.CA ALLIANCE

411 Initiative for Change  
ACS Student Union  
Agents of Change  
Art City  
Art Gallery of Ontario  
Artreach Toronto  
Arts Network for Children and Youth  
Artstarts  
Artsvote  
Canadian Youth Arts Network  
CARFAC Ontario  
Centre for Information & Community Services of Ontario  
Centre for Integral Economics  
Chinese Canadian National Council, Toronto Chapter  
Dandyhorse Magazine  
Elementary Teachers of Toronto  
Eva's Initiatives  
Evergreen  
Fairlawn Neighbourhood Centre  
Grassroots Youth Collaborative  
Illegalsigns.ca  
Kate Henderson Intellectual Property & Trademark  
Lakeshore Arts  
Lotus Leaf  
Manifesto  
Mural Routes  
No.9 Contemporary Art & the Environment  
OpenCity Projects  
Regent Park Focus Youth Media Arts Centre  
Ryerson Students' Union  
Scarborough Arts Council  
Schools Without Borders  
Sketch  
Social Planning Toronto  
Spacing Magazine  
Stunt Creative  
Style in Progress  
Sunnyside Community Association  
TakingITGlobal  
The Faculty Of  
The Gladstone Hotel  
The Remix Project  
The Stop Community Food Centre them.ca  
Threads 4 Humanity  
Toronto Arts Council Foundation  
Toronto Cyclists Union  
Toronto Public Space Committee  
Toronto Youth Cabinet  
University of Toronto Student Union  
Urban Arts  
Well and Good Art Space  
Why Not Theatre  
Youth Action Network

#### **4) FISCAL STABILITY MEANS STRATEGIC INVESTMENT**

The target of 18 million constitutes a rounding error in the context of the total city budget (0.002 % of 8.7b). Scuttling this city building idea to address the current budget crisis will ultimately be counterproductive to the long-term health of the economy, competitiveness, civic participation and even sense of ownership in Toronto. Consider that a McKinsey and Co. study in 2006 found that "for every 1 dollar of public arts funding in a regional economy, 8 are generated."

#### **5) LIVE UP TO COMMITMENTS TO ENHANCE COMPETITIVENESS AND TOURIST DRAW**

City Council approved the *Culture Plan for the Creative City* in 2003 including increase the per capita spending on culture to \$25 by 2008. This has failed: consider Toronto's current \$18 per capita spending as compared to Vancouver at \$19, Montreal at \$32, New York at \$54 and San Francisco at \$80.

#### **6) TORONTONIANS WANT THIS TO GO TO ART – REGARDLESS OF THE EXCUSES OR CONTEXT**

An Environics Poll clearly shows that Torontonians want this tax to increase arts funding in order to enhance the city and most notably, were surveyed during the last major budget crisis. Torontonians understand the connection between culture and a healthy economy. According to an Ipsos Reid poll, reported in *Municipal World Magazine* in 2007, "91% of respondents agreed that "a vibrant arts and cultural scene can be a significant contributor to a community's economy."

#### **7) CHOOSE PROSPERITY - ATTRACT / RETAIN JOBS AND TALENT**

*In Successful Canadian Cities: Mission Possible* (2007) The Conference Board of Canada argues "if Canada's largest cities are to become world-class centres of design, architecture, and culture, and attract young, talented, creative people, they will have to do more than invest in physical infrastructure. They will have to sustain vibrant cultures and become centres of excellence...Cities that offer a high quality of life attract and retain firms and workers in the knowledge-intensive and creative fields."

#### **8) BUILD HEALTHIER, MORE VIBRANT AND REFLECTIVE COMMUNITIES**

According to a report from the University of Pennsylvania, Social Impacts of the Arts Project "Low income neighbourhoods with higher cultural participation are four times more likely than average to have low delinquency rates. Neighbourhoods with an active arts scene are nearly three times more likely to see their poverty rates decline and their population increase." The city also needs to make significant improvements to its public spaces in preparation for the PAN-AM Games in showing a vibrant and reflective face to the world. Well designed public spaces also boost property values and create opportunities for small business.

#### **9) BUILD TRUST, MAINTAIN OWNERSHIP AND CIVIC PARTICIPATION**

The position of the city in all consultations has been that the funds will go to supporting enforcement and arts and culture. Revoking the provision to improve public spaces and diverting funds to general revenue (or worse, replacing arts funding) will be perceived as a 'bait and switch' in selling the tax to the public. Deceptive or ambiguous action undermines trust in the city, the legitimacy of civic participation and may produce long-term disenfranchisement for the thousands of young people who have participated in creating and pushing this policy forward for the past seven years. Widely supported, citizen led attempts to improve the city should be rewarded with actionable policy rather than wasted.

#### **KEY SOURCES – DIRECT LINKS AVAILABLE AT BEAUTIFULCITY.CA UNDER DOWNLOADS**

Councillor's Brief (300 KB PDF) <http://www.beautifulcity.ca/bcbf/BCBF-Brief-v10.pdf>

Industry Arguments Against: [http://www.beautifulcity.ca/What\\_Is\\_The\\_Industry\\_Saving.pdf](http://www.beautifulcity.ca/What_Is_The_Industry_Saving.pdf)

2007 Environics Poll (SUMMARY PDF) <http://www.beautifulcity.ca/bcbf/Environics.pdf>

Funding to Arts and Cultural Organizations by the City of Toronto 1990-2008 (Martin Prosperity

Institute) <http://martinprosperity.org/research-and-publications/publication/funding-to-arts-and-cultural-organizations-by-the-city-of-toronto>

A Business Case for Investment in the Arts (McKinsey & Co - 900 kb PPT) <http://www.beautifulcity.ca/bcbf/CBAC.ppt>