

CHARGE ON BILLBOARDS FOR ART IN THE PUBLIC SPHERE

Executive Summary v14

OVERVIEW

The Beautifulcity.ca Alliance proposes a charge paid by billboard advertisers through an annual license fee or tax. Revenue would be dedicated to art in the public sphere (e.g. public art: murals, sculptures, festivals, accessible programming, free admission, outdoor performances, etc.) as well as enforcement of the new billboard bylaw.

Going to Council Nov. 30/Dec. 1st, at earlier staff estimated, mid-range revenues of \$18 million annually (currently staff are citing 11 million) the following benefits to the city would be possible:

- An historic 53% increase to the annual municipal funding available to all artists, festivals and arts institutions.
- Close to \$100 000.00 dollars for public realm improvement for each Toronto ward, including projects such as greening, every year.
- Over \$300 000.00 annually for each of the 13 priority neighbourhoods to fund accessible youth arts programming.
- Enforcement of the signs by-law through the hiring of 17 dedicated staff.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Improve Public Spaces

Support free arts programming in the public sphere to balance some of the impact billboards have on Toronto's landscape.

2. Diversify Access

Place a priority on funding marginalized communities and youth art to revitalize communities and engage youth within their communities.

3. Arms Length Disbursement

Disbursed through an arm's length process such as the Toronto Arts Council and peer assessed juries to ensure excellence and separate collection and benefit.

4. Financial Significance

Revenues must be significant enough to be worth collecting and make a great positive impact on Toronto's visual landscape, both through enforcement of the new by-law and through the number of new arts projects funded.

BACKGROUND

2002/3 – First proposed during the *Culture Plan for a Creative City* consultations.

2005 – Pollara poll shows that 66 % of Torontonians “support charging a fee on billboards to fund public art” - only 15% oppose.

2005 – Proposal referred to MLS for review by Mayor's Office.

2006 – *City of Toronto Act* passes, followed by *Revenue Tools Consultations*. Billboard tax for art is cited in staff report as unique in having a strong and broad spectrum of public support.

2007 – Environics poll shows that 7/10 Toronto Voters want the city to “introduce a tax on billboards with revenues directed to public art.”

2007 – Tax recommended for review by Executive Committee, Deputy City Manager and Chief Financial Officer, specifically to pay for arts and culture and bylaw enforcement.

2008/9 - 50 organizations endorse the Alliance's proposal along with over 3000 petition signatories and 1,100 Facebook supporters (including 8 City Councillors.)

2009 – Sign Bylaw Project publishes projected revenue of up to \$52 million from Third Party Billboard Charge: available at www.toronto.ca/signbylawproject.

2009 – Over 300 people attend the Beautifulcity.ca Town Hall in Council Chambers.

2009 – Policy delayed multiple times then PGM passes 6-0 / defers all decisions to Council.

2010 – Billboard enforcement and charge for public art fully implemented. Toronto celebrated around the world for its cultural innovation. Hundreds of large and small arts projects made viable across Toronto each year. Economic spin off effects of this historic increase to arts funding helps to ease recession and youth unemployment. Tourism goes up. Torontonians enjoy a more humane, fair and beautiful city.



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BEAUTIFULCITY.CA ALLIANCE

411 Initiative for Change
ACS Student Union
Agents of Change
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
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

9 REASONS TO SUPPORT A DEDICATED CHARGE ON BILLBOARDS WITH THE FUNDS GOING TO PUBLIC ART

1) Support Growth in the Local Economy

Any plan for fiscal stability in Toronto should include strategic investment. Funds to the arts create jobs and bolster the local economy. A Council for Business and the Arts study released in August 2006 states that for every dollar of public arts funding in a regional economy, eight dollars are generated.¹ To suggest that Toronto cannot afford a dedicated fee or tax for art would be going against the wishes of a majority of Toronto voters -- surveyed during a peak of the fiscal crisis. Torontonians are knowledgeable enough to understand the relationship between vibrant culture and the resulting healthier economy.²

2) Equalize Access to Freedom of Expression in Public Spaces

In some cities, billboard taxes have been challenged on the basis that they restrict freedom of expression. This proposal is unique in countering this argument because it will expand the freedom to express in a much wider and equitable sense: policy includes a funding priority on youth art and marginalized communities. Access to visual communication in public spaces needs to reflect the creativity and multiplicity that exists in Toronto -- less of this and we risk alienating our population from their environment. This funding priority will not only make Toronto a more reflective city, but also healthier. According to a report from the University of Pennsylvania "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."³

Currently, there is an over-saturation of billboards to the point that it damages the industry as a whole.⁴ Furthermore, many commercial messages have been proven to be harmful to mental health, more so when they are unavoidable.⁵ Diversifying and equalizing access to expression in public spaces using art will make Toronto a fairer, more beautiful and reflective city.

3) Respect the Wishes of the Majority of Toronto Voters for Positive Change

According to a 2007 Environics Poll, 7/10 of Toronto voters want the city to "introduce a tax on billboards with revenues directed to public art." The billboard charge for art was also one of the few proposed taxes in the *Revenue Tools Consultations* that received a broad spectrum of support. Additionally, the project has received campaign postcards and petition signatures from citizens residing in every Toronto ward.

4) Support Better Regulation and Enforcement of Billboards

Beautifulcity.ca calls for increased resources devoted to billboard enforcement and regulation. An Environics survey commissioned by the Alliance in 2007 indicates that 8/10 of municipal voters support "the city removing billboards that violate city bylaws and implementing fines to a level that discourages future violations. Furthermore, 7/10 of municipal voters are in support of "the city working to reduce billboards and corporate posters in general." Over 3000 people have also signed a petition that calls for "more funding for tracking and policing billboard advertisers." Towards the aim of better regulation, using peer assessed juries and arms length bodies such as the Toronto Arts Council to distribute revenue is essential. Collection and benefit (artistic, community or political) must be clearly separated to prevent any chance of sign incentives developing. Additionally, ensure artistic excellence and freedom of expression.

¹ CBAC, "A strategic and economic business case for investment in the arts in Canada" August, 2007 <http://www.beautifulcity.ca/bcbf/CBAC.ppt>

² Ipsos Reid poll, reported in *Municipal World Magazine*, 2007 (91% of respondents agreed that "a vibrant arts and cultural scene can be a significant contributor to a community's economy.")

³ Seifert, Stern, SIAP, University of Pennsylvania. 1994-Present (<http://www.sp2.upenn.edu/SIAP/>)

⁴ Beckman & Rigby "Foundations of Marketing," *Harcourt Canada*, 2001

⁵ Rachel Shields, "By 12, girls have seen 77,500 ads. And does it make them happy?" *The Independent*, October 7th 2007. ("surveyed 2,000 girls in the UK and the US aged between 10 and 14...77 per cent of them reported feeling fat, ugly and depressed when faced with pictures of beautiful models and celebrities. More than half of these adolescents then described themselves in negative terms, using words such as "disgusting" and "ugly")

5) Create Ownership, Sense of Place and Local Efficacy

Billboards can undermine sense of place and the perception of public ownership, while localized art projects can enhance collective efficacy.⁶ Thus, this proposal works as a remedial act – enabling and spurring residents to add to their communities in a positive format. Powerful symbolic capital can also be found in enacting this project, proving that our shared spaces cannot be treated poorly for the benefit of private interests.

6) Make the Municipality Responsive to Citizen Initiatives to Improve Toronto

This idea was first introduced during the *Culture Plan for the Creative City* consultations in 2002. Since then, the alliance has commissioned two rounds of favourable public opinion polls; conducted two postcard campaigns; circulated a petition; created a popular website; conducted a media event at the Harbourfront Centre, and has been covered in over 30 media outlets. Beautifulcity.ca has also been committed to using advocacy methods that strengthen local democracy such as: educating youth about who their local Councillor is and how local politics functions; using actionable research; petitions; well attended town halls; coalition building and community mapping.

7) Help Move Toronto Towards a Pedestrian Friendly Aesthetic

The charge on billboards for art will assist in moving Toronto away from a car-based aesthetic (billboards) towards a more pedestrian feel. The vast majority of public art requires people to leave their cars to explore their communities at a more intimate level -- and significantly rewards them for doing so.

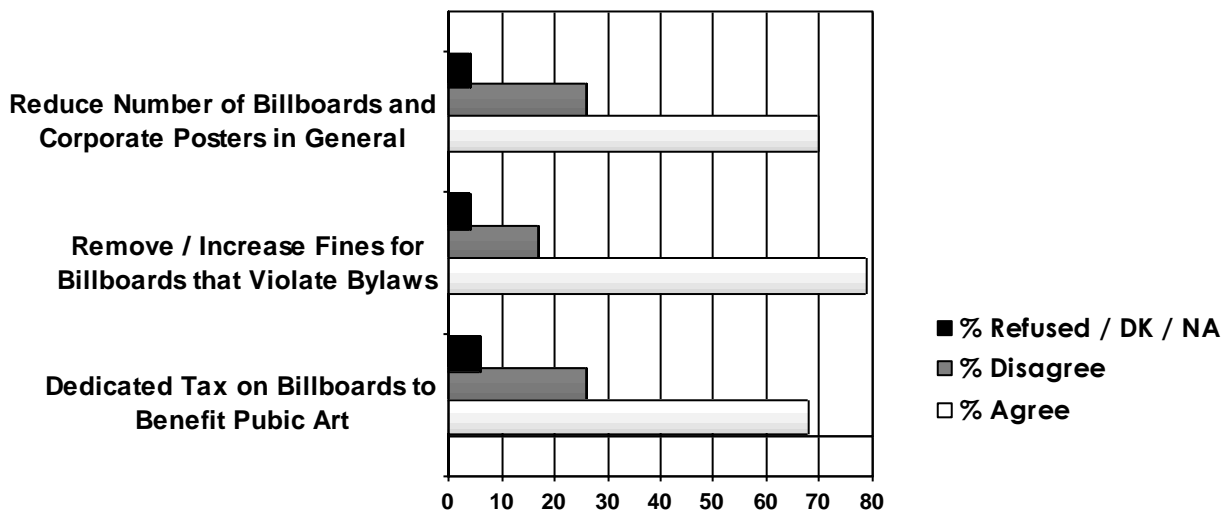
8) Enhance the City for Tourist Draw and Torontonians

Toronto is often referred to as a ‘soulless economic hub.’ A commitment such as this towards innovative and widespread beautification will help promote Toronto as an aesthetically pleasing city and internationally -- establish a resonant standard.

9) Build Toronto’s Commitment to Arts and Global Competitiveness

Culture is increasingly known as the keystone to global competitiveness and thus, the sustainability of a city.⁷ Toronto, at approximately \$13 lags behind major North American cities in per-capita arts and culture spending.⁸ Compare Vancouver at \$19, Montreal at \$32, New York at \$54 and San Francisco at \$80. According to the Martin Prosperity Institute, “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.”⁹

(Fig.1) Environics: Vast Majority of Toronto Voters Want Public Space Enhancements



⁶ Dr. Folsom & D. Ostrom, “Music For The Eyes” *Let’s Talk, Correction Services Canada*, Vol. 29 #2 2003

⁷ See Dr. Florida’s website: www.creativeclass.org

⁸ City of Toronto, “Culture Plan Progress Report” *Culture Division*, November 2005

⁹ A. Bell and K. Stolarick, “Funding to Arts and Cultural Institutions by the City of Toronto,” 1990-2008” Martin Prosperity Institute, 2008 <http://martinprosperity.org/research-and-publications/publication/funding-to-arts-and-cultural-organizations-by-the-city-of-toronto>



October 4, 2007

Environics conducted a telephone survey for the BCBF [BeautifulCity.ca] The survey was conducted among a random sample of 216 residents of the City of Toronto, aged 18 years of age and older. The margin of error for a sample of this size is plus or minus 6.7 percentage points, 19 times out of 20. The survey was conducted during the period September 6-9 & 20-26, 2007. [And closely replicated in a 2005 Pollara Poll with a larger sample size]. The question format used and findings are summarized below. [The full datasets can be downloaded at: <http://www.beautifulcity.ca/bcbf/Environics-RawData.doc>]

Currently, there is a campaign in Toronto aimed at enhancing and protecting public space. This could include beautifying the city, funding the arts and reducing the number of billboards that violate city of Toronto bylaws (e.g., too big, no permit, too close to existing signs). Several actions have been suggested to address this, and some or all of them could be implemented. Do you strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree or strongly disagree with the following mix of actions?

a) The City of Toronto should introduce a tax on billboards with revenues directed to public art through the Toronto Arts Council.

	Total Toronto	Will / Have Voted in Municipal Election
Agree	65%	68%
Disagree	29%	26%
Refused/DK/NA	6%	7%

b) The City of Toronto should remove billboards that violate city bylaws and implement fines to a level that discourages future violation of city bylaws.

	Total Toronto	Will / Have Voted in Municipal Election
Agree	78%	79%
Disagree	18%	17%
Refused/DK/NA	4%	4%

c) The City should work to reduce the number of billboard advertisements and corporate posters in general.

	Total Toronto	Will / Have Voted in Municipal Election
Agree	68%	70%
Disagree	29%	26%
Refused/DK/NA	3%	4%