

NEWS

Light 'em up

Lampposts will make Bloor prettier, some say safer

BY MATT HO

A budget has been approved by the Bloor Annex Business Improvement Area (BIA) for new lighting to deal with criminal activity on Bloor Street.

The area has been threatened with several incidents of violent crime recently.

"That just added to a whole list of issues that have been arising again over the last few years," said Jeff Barber, owner of Sonic Boom (512 Bloor St. W.), speaking of the murder at the Brunswick House (481 Bloor St. W.) this past summer.

"There's been a few violent crime incidents in particular that were starting to be a concern. Also some breaking and entering has greatly increased over the last year," he said.

Board members made their concerns known to authorities, who suggested that brighter lighting could be a possible solution. "One of our board members was having a discussion with the police. The police recommended, for a lack of a better word, 'brightening up' the street and [said] that is a great deterrent," said Barber.

Safety is not the only reason that new lights are being installed.

"[The reason for] the addition of these particular lights is that they will allow us the ability to have seasonal lighting—like holiday lighting—that

we'd been wanting to do for a long time," said Barber. "We're still going to have that tall lighting in place but this will add a bit more of a quaint feel to the neighbourhood, I'm hoping."

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—Jeff Barber, Sonic Boom

The proposed budget for the new pedestrian lights is \$36,000, with which about 24 new lampposts will be installed by 2010. The lighting company only supplies the lights with installation as a separate fee.

Whether or not new lights will help prevent crime is debatable. While it may help, Michel Sauve, the operations manager of Midoco Arts and Office Supplies (555 Bloor St. W.) feels that the police are just as responsible for neighbourhood safety.

"It can take hours for the police to show up, if at all, after we call them to report a shoplifting incident. I understand that there are often more pressing emergencies in the city than these types of crimes.

But these are, in fact, crimes. I feel that if the police saw fit to respond to these calls in a timely manner, it would act as a disincentive for these crooks to target us," Sauve wrote in an email.

Hamish Wilson, one of the founders for Bells on Bloor, was frustrated when he first heard about the new changes. In a letter he handed out at the BIA meeting, he wrote that if there are changes to be made with public money being spent, "it must be on bike safety, not frills."

"To have \$18,000, or half of the cost of the new lighting, coming from the city when that same amount could be allocated to repainting Bloor Street in the Annex from Bathurst over to Spadina for cycling safety, to me that's pretty calous," said Wilson.

On the other hand, he said it's great that merchants want to improve the feel of the area.

"In my understanding, the bike lane issue has nothing to do with money. This is not taking away from any future bike lane plans or decisions to go ahead with that or not," said Barber.

Sauve supports the project and hopes that the lighting will help reduce crime in the neighbourhood. "All businesses stand to benefit from an improved aesthetic."



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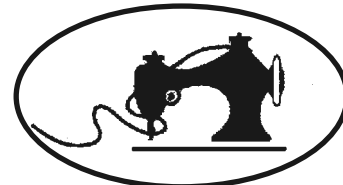
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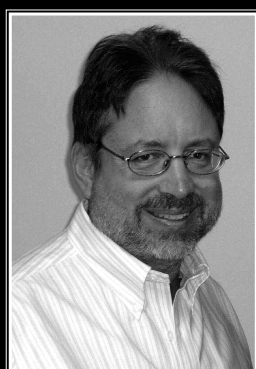
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