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Entertainment District Overhaul

by Jenn Reid

Jun 17, 2009

The Entertainment District is going to get an overhaul and a new look – eventually. The city of Toronto and the ED Business Improvement Area (BIA) unveiled their new master plan for the area, and though they started developing it in 2008, they were finally able to make it official in a press conference yesterday.

Councillor Adam Vaughan said the area is evolving and will become “everything the city needs a street, a neighbourhood, a district to do.”

Basically, the BIA wants to take the Entertainment District, clean it up, fill it with parks, boutiques, festivals and people, and make more walkways and promenades. All of this is to give the area an economic boost and hopefully make it a more desirable area of the city.

There's a lot promised in this new design. They want to blend the older more historic buildings with new architecture, tie together smaller areas within the district, and make the nightlife scene safer with larger sidewalks and better lighting. It's a lot of great ideas, but like “peace on earth” and “stop world hunger”, great ideas are often easier said than done. With some stages already underway and others still in the developmental stage, time will tell.

The BIA views the district as having several different areas, each with their own needs and plans. Binding the areas together is John Street, which will act as the spine of the district. Here's a breakdown of what they plan to do:

Clarence Square

The BIA plans to revitalize this area by extending the park space, adding public art installations and making sure the trees and skyline still permit lots of sun to permeate the area – whenever the sun is actually out, of course. The idea (echoed throughout the whole plan) is a European-inspired look.

Simcoe Square and Front Street

This area is going to get a paved gathering space, for local festivals and small scale concerts. The BIA is hoping that this will increase the number of tourists staying in the area after checking out a ball game, instead of just heading back to Union Station. They are putting in a pedestrian crossing, but want to keep room for the CBC building to grow.

Front Street & Union Station

Plaza's seem to be the answer for making this area better. The BIA wants to not only improve the Air Canada Centre plaza (maybe put in something more than a Pizza Pizza?) but also add another plaza at Front Street. The area will be paved with street furnishings and art so the commuters have something else to ignore as they run for their train.

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Richmond & Adelaide Streets

Narrowing is the key word here, as the BIA wants to narrow the streets without decreasing traffic or increasing congestion. With one lane turning permanently into street-side parking, they hope one-way (and maybe even two-way) traffic will still be able to continue without a major redesign of the roads.

"The Mews"

If you've never heard of The Mews, don't worry. It's not actually a part of the city, but it's still a part of the master plan. This area is based on designs from other cities, with wide sidewalks and paved roadways to accommodate street festivals and special events, themed signage and a boutique format for businesses. The BIA hopes to implement this picturesque neighbourhood into the district.

John Street

John Street has the most riding on it in this new plan, as officials want it to be what brings each piece of the Entertainment District together. "It links everything from the waterfront to the AGO," said urban developer Harold Madi at the press conference. They plan on putting effort into building up the John Street promenade, and making it the first artist-designed street in the city. Ideally, the street will be able to shut down at a moment's notice for events such as the Toronto International Film Festival, Luminato, the Much Music Video Awards and other local festivals and concerts.

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