



'Defunding is the first step'

Rallies in Toronto hear calls for police funds to be divested, as U.S. protests grow in wake of shooting. Coverage, A3, A12

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SUNDAY STAR

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SUNDAY, AUGUST 30, 2020



RICHARD LAUTENS TORONTO STAR

The CafeTO program lets restaurants extend their patios into the street — an idea many would like to see continue.

Main attraction

Toronto's main drags were hit hard by the lockdown. But the pandemic also spurred fresh ideas that could lead to vibrant streets of the future

TESS KALINOWSKI
REAL ESTATE REPORTER

The pandemic has broken Laura Sellors's hungry heart.

She loves the city's food scene and has watched with dismay as the restaurant industry, an underpinning of main-street life in Toronto, struggled under the COVID-19 closure and restricted openings.

"The reality is there will be tons of vacancies across main streets in Toronto or any other city in Canada," said Sellors, a partner in Entro, a design firm that specializes in branding buildings and neighbourhoods.



After cataclysm often comes change. The pandemic has overturned our lives and our assumptions. In this occasional series, the Star looks at what lessons we might take and what future we might build.

"It's such a shame those are the folks affected — that and the cultural sector," she said.

The upside is there will be new oppor-

tunities for startups in markets that will be reinvented, said Sellors.

She is impressed, however, with the creativity that has brought some main streets back to life this summer.

The city's CafeTO program has seen 715 restaurants spill outdoor seating onto the sidewalks and curb lanes, along with 44 parklets that encourage people to linger longer on the streets.

Layered with lighting, planter boxes and signage, they are the features that create a street's identity, making it attractive to people, said Sellors.

STREETS continued on A4

What schools can learn from camps about keeping kids healthy

Small cohorts, daily screening among measures that helped day camps avoid outbreaks

NOOR JAVED
STAFF REPORTER

As two million students across Ontario get ready to return to school, day camps, which have been running for much of the summer with almost no cases of COVID-19, could provide some insight into how to create an environment where kids can learn and play safely.

Some lessons learned from almost two months of summer camp include the importance of creating cohorts, strictly controlling the environment, increased hand-washing and "being prepared for everything."

In June, when much of the province was in lockdown, day camps and day-cares across the GTA were planning programs that could accommodate large groups of children in relatively close proximity, with stringent new health and safety rules in place.

"When we began rolling out the CampTO program, it was early on in the summer ... and at first we weren't even sure if we were allowed to offer it," said Janie Romoff, general manager of parks, forestry and recreation for the city of Toronto. The province was still in Stage 1 of the reopening, limiting congregations and gatherings.

But towards the end of June, the province put out guidelines for day camps that could be opened when a municipality entered Stage 2.

"What we learned is that you can operate programs for children safely, you can implement the appropriate health and safety guidelines, and you can

CAMPS continued on A7

Man with a plan: How O'Toole won Tory leadership prize

A strong digital campaign and an often weak opponent gave MP the edge, insiders say

ALEX BOULTIER
OTTAWA BUREAU

OTTAWA—Erin O'Toole and Conservative operator Fred DeLorey huddled over a beer in the corner of the Christmas party as well-connected Tories mixed and mingled around them.

Dec. 12 had been quite a day. Less than two months after the Con-

servatives' disappointing election loss, an embattled Andrew Scheer had shocked Ottawa by announcing he'd step down as the party's leader.

It was a topic of much conversation at that party in Toronto, hosted by TD Bank vice-president and longtime conservative James Dodds.

Premier Doug Ford stopped by with season's greetings, as did Ontario cabinet ministers like Rod Phillips, Todd Smith and Lisa Thompson.

Also in attendance: Walied Soliman, Tausha Michaud, Melanie Paradis and

Jim Burnett — the core of what would become O'Toole's leadership campaign.

After huddling with DeLorey for about an hour, O'Toole made the biggest decision of his political career: he'd once again seek the Conservative leadership.

In the days after O'Toole's come-from-behind victory, the Star spoke with senior Conservative sources, including some who worked on his campaign.

O'TOOLE continued on A6



Mistaken identity

Tory leader's win leads to new following for U.S. radio host with same name, A6

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New patios, parks could be here to stay

STREETS from A1

Toronto's main streets, such as Danforth Avenue, Roncesvalles Avenue, Bloor Street West and Queen East and West, are a key part of the city's brand — residents identify with them as the jewels of their neighbourhoods. But many stretches were already struggling to compete with internet shopping, high rents and taxes before COVID-19. Now they are faced with the loss of some defining businesses.

Designers, planners, merchants associations and politicians say it is critical that the city's main streets are still lively hubs of commerce and community when people feel safe to go out again.

The problem, said Sellors, is that "we're coming into winter. The shelf life of this patio experience is so short."

Many merchants have used their reserves to survive the spring and summer. There isn't much left for the colder months.

"There is no way businesses like that are equipped to sustain themselves for six months. A local restaurant or shop — if you don't have customers coming in every day, there is very little chance you can survive beyond a month, two months at best," she said.

The challenge on main streets isn't new, said Toronto's chief planner, Gregg Lintern. He doesn't minimize the current distress of businesses, but says high streets are resilient. Historically, they have found ways to survive because they serve a purpose.

"Living and working locally is an old-fashioned concept ... (that) makes sense environmentally, makes sense from a transportation point of view," he said.

That is why main streets were able to compete even after the postwar proliferation of cars that suddenly saw shoppers flock to suburban shopping centres.

Increasingly, the main-street concept is being translated to suburban settings. The Shops at Don Mills, a mall at Don Mills Road and Lawrence Avenue East, has lined its streets with upscale outdoor offerings and twinkling patio eateries this summer.

Toronto developer Leith Moore is less optimistic about the survival of the pre-COVID main street.

"Anybody who didn't know they could get everything delivered before (COVID), knows now," he said.

He thinks that live-work spaces are one way of staving off empty storefronts. His company R-Hauz is building a prototype of a prefabricated structure on Queen Street East. The prefab panels of R-Hauz designs provide faster, quieter construction because they are built off-site and then assembled on the building plot. The concept allows for different building configurations up to six storeys.

Part of the answer to empty storefronts, said Moore, is to design buildings that can cycle through the good and bad times. He said Toronto zoning needs to be more permissive in allowing smaller street-facing storefronts with private space at the back and rental housing above to provide additional income.

"If you're an entrepreneur, you can't afford to rent a home and a business location. If you can combine them, you can make a go of it," he said. "You can have a bedroom at the back; the middle is your flex space — your kitchen (or) office during the day; the front remains to the street if you're an office, an artist, a retailer."

Lintern says it's tricky to balance residential and working spaces. "Retail and restaurants are more animating. When it tilts too far to people living, it can have a deadening effect on the activity," he said.

The Canadian Urban Institute is running a Bring Back Main Street campaign designed to provide policy and design rec-



RICHARD LAUTENS TORONTO STAR

Despite the success of Danforth Avenue's makeover this summer, with new bike lanes and extended patios, it's unclear how businesses will fare in the fall when the cold weather arrives and the city's CafeTO program is slated to end.



Prefabricated wooden panels are installed on the prototype for a new main-street live-work housing model called R-Hauz. Company founder Leith Moore thinks that live-work spaces are one way of staving off empty storefronts.

What happens, he said, if the weather doesn't co-operate through the fall, if there's a second wave of COVID in addition to the flu season.

"It won't help our restaurants if the (COVID) numbers tick up," said Stortchak.

Destination Danforth is designed to connect the transportation flow along the street from Dawes Road to Broadview Avenue, including separated bike lanes. It spans four different BIAs, each identified under separate coloured street banners, said city Coun. Paula Fletcher, who called it the city's most ambitious "complete streets" program to date.

She said the Danforth was overdue for an upgrade 27 years after the Taste of the Danforth festival (cancelled this year) was founded to promote the street and the city's Greek culture.

"People come to the Danforth once a year for Taste. We want them to come more than once a year," said Fletcher.

Destination Danforth makes the street safer and more inviting for cyclists, pedestrians and cars, she said.

But in rule-bound Toronto, Fletcher said the project likely wouldn't have been built as quickly and seamlessly if the city hadn't recognized the merchants' struggle, which converged with the need for transportation alternatives because people weren't riding the TTC.

"When we started the Danforth study — now Destination Danforth — we were going to do little pieces and parts, odds and sods, with it. But this approach of just grabbing a really big piece and bringing everyone together and saying let's make this the best possible, that's COVID-related," said Fletcher.

She thinks the project has set a precedent that businesses and residents will expect after the need for physical distancing has passed.

"Moving patios into the curb lane, that's pretty exciting. Having parklets anywhere where you have the cafés, that's going to be interesting," said Fletcher.

"This is something that I don't think will change after COVID."

Stortchak praised the city and government assistance programs that have helped BIA members stay afloat. But he wonders what happens when CafeTO folds on Nov. 16.

"Once the parking comes back, the planters will be taken up and it will revert back to a traditional streetscape with bike and parking and traffic," he said.

"It's not going to look as attractive," said Stortchak.

Merchants are hoping the city will consider renewing the café program next year.

Meantime, the BIA will need money to activate the Danforth in cold weather. The business group is already working on next year's financial plan and, "out of necessity it will be an austerity budget," said Stortchak.

Ways to give main streets a boost

Light it up

Lighting draws people into a space and makes them feel safe, especially in winter, says Entro partner Laura Sellors. She acknowledged that lighting costs money, but said "somebody should do a return-on-investment analysis."

Sellors pointed to the Bentway, one of Toronto's hippest spaces for skating, warming stations and events. "If there's no lighting, you would never go under the Gardiner (Expressway)," she said.

Reconsider winter

The climate is changing. That means there are only a few days a year when cycling isn't feasible, said Toronto chief planner Gregg Lintern.

"There's no question the new cycling facilities can be cleaned and plowed and maintained so people can still cycle," he said. "We know there is a strong relationship between cycling and retail and restaurants. There are some studies that show people frequent retail more often on a bike than they do in a car."

Another winter city, Copenhagen, uses outdoor heaters, umbrellas and blankets to provide comfort to cold customers, said Matt Blackett, a founder of Spacing magazine.

Streetside patios might not be practical because you would need barriers to protect diners from the splash of passing cars, he said. But the city might consider allowing winter

patios in laneways and converting some Green P parking into dining spaces or markets.

In the meantime

Empty stores and vacant lots that deaden a street can be converted to what planners are calling "meanwhile spaces." Lintern says examples already exist in Toronto, notably the Stack shipping container market at Bathurst and Front streets. It stands on an empty city plot designated to later become a park.

Sellors says community groups, landlords and other partners can be enlisted to animate vacant spaces, turning them into activity hubs, galleries or even just decorating the windows.

Touchless tech

COVID has people seeking more space with touchless access. Touch screens will disappear, said Sellors.

She suggested that doors could be pedal-operated or motion-activated.

QR codes can be used to access the menu at the local pub or add to the street experience by letting you scan a lamp post with your phone to learn about the history of the neighbourhood, for example.

"It's like a car that unlocks and your keys are in your purse. Those are the things that make the user experience so much better and easier to go to," said Sellors.

Tess Kalinowski

ommendations that will nurture main streets across the country. Its CEO, Mary Rowe, said cities need to be vigilant about making sure that the solutions that have proved successful so far — things like take-out wine and beer — are allowed to continue.

Because COVID has altered people's attitudes about how far and how often they want to leave their homes, that could actually nourish main streets as gathering places and centres of

commerce, she said.

Some businesses with marginal cash flow will succumb. But other small businesses with strong local connections may actually have the upper hand on less nimble, more distant chains, said Rowe.

COVID is an opportunity in which consumers suddenly place more value on shops and services that are close and familiar, she said.

"If you didn't want to deal with the risks of going to Costco or a