

ROBERTO CURTO FOR MAYOR

QUEEN WEST MAIN STREET PLAN

A Small Business and Cultural Revitalization Proposal



More Music. More Character. More Queen West.

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Queen West Creative Main Street

A place to discover again

Queen Street West became famous because it was unpredictable. Music venues, independent shops, restaurants, artists and strange little businesses made it somewhere Torontonians went without necessarily knowing what they would find.

We want to make Queen West a place to discover again. Our plan combines small-business development, music and nightlife, public-realm improvements and direct investment in new ideas to rebuild one of Canada's great cultural and commercial streets.

THE IDEA

Give Toronto's creative people room to take risks, make music visible on the street again, put vacant spaces to work and build a Queen West worth crossing the city for.

1) The Queen West Accelerator

Toronto has no shortage of creative people with great ideas. What many do not have is the capital, business expertise or affordable commercial space to make those ideas real.

- Goal: To create a City-supported Queen West Accelerator for entrepreneurs who want to open the next great Toronto business.

Each year, the City will select approximately 20 promising entrepreneurs and concepts for an intensive program. Participants will work with Toronto entrepreneurs, restaurant and hospitality professionals, retailers, designers and architects, accountants and lawyers, branding experts, commercial real-estate professionals, cultural leaders and investors. They will develop their concept, financing, brand and operating plan before presenting it to an independent panel.

The Queen West Pitch

Finalists will pitch publicly. We will not simply look for the safest investment. We will look for ideas that can become destinations: businesses that generate excitement, attract visitors and contribute something Toronto does not already have.

THE TEST

Would you cross the city to go there? Judges will score originality, financial viability, year-round sustainability, contribution to Queen West, community benefit and destination potential. A credible business model matters as much as the buzz.

An independent panel of entrepreneurs, business experts, investors and cultural leaders will select three winning concepts. Each winner will receive:

- **Six months of rent-free space.** The City will negotiate a portfolio of participating vacant Queen West spaces with landlords before the competition. Landlords receive guaranteed occupancy or rent support; entrepreneurs get room to launch without full rent from day one.
- **A path to remain.** Where possible, landlords will agree in advance to a defined post-accelerator rental structure. We should not help build an amazing business only to see it immediately priced off Queen West.
- **Support after the pitch.** Winners receive continued mentorship and help navigating City permits and approvals. The aim is to graduate into a regular lease and stay on the street.

The winners need not be conventional cafés, bars or shops. A tiny jazz club. A listening bar. A 70-seat comedy room. An experimental theatre. A late-night dessert shop. A Toronto fashion collective. A strange bookstore bar hybrid. The point is specifically not knowing what wins.

Promising participants who do not win one of the three awards can still test their ideas through shorter pop-up opportunities in the storefront program. The City's role is to create a runway, not choose Toronto's culture for it.

2) Bring Music Back to Queen

Queen West's identity is inseparable from music. We will establish a Queen West Music District that supports venues and musicians while making live music visible on the street again. The City will work with the music sector, BIAs and property owners to attract and retain independent venues along the corridor.

Queen West Music Spots

Evaluate side streets, laneways, small public spaces and overlooked corners for five to ten permanent or seasonal Music Spots. These are neighbourhood stages, not giant concert sites. Each suitable location could have:

- **The basics.** Good lighting, electrical connections where practical, seating nearby, clear performance hours and a recognizable Queen West Music Spot marker.
- **Room for different performers.** Local musicians could reserve some performance periods while others remain available for permitted busking. Site choices must respect accessibility, nearby homes and safe pedestrian movement.

Support new venues and protect existing ones

Create a dedicated support stream for independent music venues and other small cultural spaces. Depending on the project and funding, eligible help could cover soundproofing, accessibility upgrades, modest renovations, equipment, business planning, programming partnerships, temporary venues and permit navigation.

Focus on the small rooms that make a music ecosystem: listening bars, jazz clubs, rehearsal spaces and intimate venues where emerging artists can build an audience. A dedicated City liaison will help independent venues work through licensing, zoning, noise and building requirements. Where

redevelopment threatens an established cultural venue, pursue replacement space in the project where feasible and lawful.

Queen West Music Week

Bring established venues, Music Spots, record stores, restaurants, galleries and local artists together for an annual week of live performances, artist showcases, record fairs, listening sessions, workshops, all-ages programming and late-night shows. This should be a coordinated celebration that sends people into the businesses and venues already making Queen West special, not a single fenced-off festival.

3) No More Dead Storefronts

An empty storefront does not only affect its landlord. Ten empty storefronts affect an entire street. Launch a Queen West Storefront Initiative with the City, BIAs, landlords, entrepreneurs and cultural organizations to return vacant commercial spaces to productive use.

- **Know what is available.** Maintain a regularly updated, voluntary inventory of vacant spaces and connect willing property owners with prospective tenants.
- **Make temporary uses easier.** Use clear agreements and approval guidance for pop-up shops, galleries, exhibitions, artist studios, small performances, Toronto designers, experimental retail, community programming and temporary music venues.
- **Give new ideas a real-world test.** Match promising accelerator participants who do not win a major award with shorter pop-up opportunities and showcase spaces.

Instead of brown paper and “For Lease” signs, vacant storefronts can become laboratories for the next generation of Toronto businesses.

4) Make Queen West a Great Street

Revitalization cannot stop at the property line. Queen West should be somewhere people want to walk slowly, sit down, meet someone and stay another hour. Develop a Queen West Public Realm Plan with BIAs, residents, businesses and accessibility advocates focused on:

- **The everyday street.** More places to sit, more trees and shade, better lighting and sidewalks, cleaner streets, safer crossings, public art, patios and space for performances.
- **Side streets and laneways.** Turn selected overlooked spaces into extensions of Queen West with murals, lighting, music, seating, patios, installations and small gathering places.
- **Pedestrian-priority evenings.** Try selected blocks or side streets during summer evenings, weekends or special events. Measure access, deliveries, transit, safety and local business impacts; keep what works and change what does not.

Queen West After Dark

Bring the pieces together through recurring summer evenings built around businesses already on the street. Music Spots come alive. Galleries and shops stay open later. Restaurants extend patios. Pop-ups take over vacant spaces. Artists perform and side streets host programming. Different nights can showcase different parts of Toronto's culture.

The purpose is not to manufacture authenticity. It is to give Toronto's creative community the space to create it.

5) Start on Queen and Take It Across Toronto

Queen West will be the starting point. Track new businesses and their survival, occupied storefronts, performances, participation, accessibility and local feedback. What works, the accelerator, landlord partnerships, storefront activation, Music Spots, venue supports, music week and public-realm improvements can inform a broader Toronto Main Streets program adapted to other commercial streets.

THE AMBITION

Let's make Queen West somewhere you go to see what's happening, not somewhere you go to remember what used to be there.