



Janette Sadik-Khan, left, a New York City public space expert, buys flowers from Chantal Brazeau at the ByWard Market on Wednesday. Sadik-Khan recommends trying a car-free ByWard Market to see if it works. *JEAN LEVAC*

## Close ByWard Market to cars, NYC transport guru urges

Move might even help business, because 'cars don't shop — people do'

**MATTHEW PEARSON**

The New York City transportation guru who closed Times Square to cars says Ottawa could do the same in the ByWard Market.

Janette Sadik-Khan visited the market on Wednesday as part of a daylong stop here, which was to culminate with an evening keynote speech to hundreds at the Aberdeen Pavilion.

"Try it, you'll like it," she said. "Cars don't shop — people do. When you prioritize pedestrians and make it easy for them to walk in and out of stores, it's much better for the bottom line of businesses."

Faced with some initial reluctance, Sadik-Khan, New York City's former transportation commissioner, created a six-month pilot project in 2009 to close Times Square to cars. That gave business owners and the public time to see how such a thing would work.

"It's not like looking at dry renderings or computer models. People can actually see and touch and feel it themselves. If it works, you keep it, and if it doesn't work, you can put it back."

Mayor Jim Watson was non-committal about whether Ottawa would ever follow the Big Apple's lead.

"If there are things we can do both short term and long term to make (ByWard Market) more

cycle- and pedestrian-friendly, we should keep an open mind," he said during a news conference alongside Sadik-Khan.

The opening of the Confederation LRT line in 2018 will make it much easier to visit ByWard Market without a car, the mayor added.

Sadik-Khan's visit to Ottawa comes as the city considers a plan to revitalize ByWard Market.

The city wants to transform the George Street plaza by doing away with outdoor vendors and creating a gateway into the market. The future Rideau LRT station will be connected to the market by the existing William Street pedestrian mall. The city is aiming for an "inviting gathering space" that opens up the facade of the market building for various activities year-round.

The city would like to remove the plaza's outdoor stalls in September, suspend vending there in 2016 and 2017, and direct staff to meet with the standholders to discuss options for vending in the new George Street plaza beginning with the 2017-18 off-market season. Any fees paid by standholders dislocated by the construction project will be refunded, the city says.

Council has earmarked \$500,000 to fix up the plaza, but the city's ultimate — and very long-term — vision for the market

would cost \$83 million. The major project would be the demolition of the city-owned parking garage and the construction of an underground garage with a new building on top.

The ByWard Market Standholders Association has bristled at the city's direction, which is spelled out in a new report to be discussed next week by the finance committee.

Standholders have offered to pay for and build six permanent stalls on the George Street plaza to keep the tradition of outdoor vending alive. The showcase stalls would sell locally grown and produced maple syrup, food products and flowers, as opposed to artisan crafts and clothing produced elsewhere, said Jo Riding, the group's spokeswoman.

"What you're going to see is the best selection of vending, not the worst," she said.

If approved, the city's plan also calls for proactive zoning enforcement to make sure bars, restaurants and nightclubs in the ByWard Market are following the rules, and the creation of a new Municipal Services Corporation to oversee operations at both ByWard and Parkdale markets.

The city will unveil its design plans for the George Street plaza on May 11, from 6 to 8 p.m., on the Freiman Bridge, the pedestrian overpass across Rideau Street that links the Rideau Centre and Hudson's Bay Co.

[mpearson@postmedia.com](mailto:mpearson@postmedia.com)  
[twitter.com/mpearson78](https://twitter.com/mpearson78)