

Councillor Must protect today's Beach, resident says (Beach Mirror, April 19, 2012)

I grew up in Don Mills - but I moved to The Beach was because of the intimate, authentic small town character of Queen Street and of the community as a whole.

Go to Don Mills these days and what do you find? Cadillac Fairview demolished the old style shopping centre, and have tried their hardest to recreate a small town commercial core - low rise buildings (without apartments) of only one storey, on-street parking, pedestrian friendly, and a feeling of openness and light.

This is what people want, and in Don Mills, it is not yet completely working in terms of the retail (too many restaurants - no hardware store!) - they have not quite pulled it off. They have tried to make the buildings look varied and vibrant while having a consistent scale and relationship to each other - but there is still a sameness to it that is a bit artificial, or even sterile or bland.

Meanwhile, Toronto does have a genuine small town in the big city - The Beach, and if redevelopment of the Lick's site is approved, the qualities that make it so unique and popular will be diminished, and probably lost entirely, as more developments follow the precedent.

Gregg Lintern said the planners are likely to recommend this project – and when they explained why, he gave generic reasons that ignored the specifics of The Beaches guidelines they had said would be enforced.

Can, one planner be right, and 250 well-informed residents be wrong? What is the point of democracy when “experts” effectively have final say on highly subjective, non-scientific decisions like what “fits” on a public street?

Didn't we learn lessons like this in the 1960s, when communities were ruined in the name of “progress” or some abstract greater good being put forth by other planners espousing roads or other things?

The planners do talk about protecting “neighbourhoods”, but by that they mean “residential side-streets” – leaving aside that the commercial main-street is the heart of a neighbourhood and it needs protection too.

Councillor McMahon always says “development is coming” like it is a new thing – but it has been coming since 1987, when the guidelines were written. The difference is before now the rules were strictly enforced by the planners and Council, to make sure development fit in.

Our Councillor talks about the visioning study, possible heritage district, and abolishing the OMB, but if she does not come out and firmly oppose the redevelopment on the Lick's site (and get just 6 others Councillors behind her), these ideas will be too little, too late. Despite 250 people showing up last week at the Friends of Queen meeting, and strong opposition to this project from the beginning last June, she has yet to firmly commit to opposing this project, or agree to requests for a development freeze.

Why is she not solidly behind her constituents on this crucial issue? Is this the “change” people voted for?

Brian Graff