

ARTICLE – MIDTOWN CRIER – Councillor Walker

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St. Paul's Residents Outraged by OMB

Overdevelopment in St. Paul's still grows with the blessing of the unelected Ontario Municipal Board (OMB). At 200 Russell Hill Road in South Hill, a low-density neighbourhood, a development proposal for 22 units in 5 and 4 storey condo buildings on ravine land was just approved after vigorous opposition from the neighbourhood and City Council. This development will be 3 times larger than what is permitted, will have 44 underground parking spots, and will destroy some of the only old growth forest habitat left in downtown Toronto.

This is a very troubling decision. It is difficult to understand why the City of Toronto should bother to develop a comprehensive Official Plan or take considered Council decisions on development when these can be overruled by a group of unelected and unaccountable provincial appointees.

Many of us are convinced that the role of the OMB is completely outdated and should be abolished for Toronto. I believe it serves primarily as a rubber stamp for the development industry, overriding the interests of democratically elected politicians and the constituents they represent. This is a mockery of the democratic process. The question we have to ask Queen's Park is: "Are the influence and financial contributions of the developers so persuasive that stable neighbourhoods in Toronto are now a thing of the past?"

Also, my proposal to petition Queen's Park to increase the provincial minimum wage to \$10/hr was finally adopted by City Council. Councillor Michael Thompson and I fought hard to get the City on record as supporting this increase in the minimum wage in order to help the many who live below the poverty line in Toronto and the province. Those employees who need help most are women and immigrants and this is one small step that will help them make ends meet. The Provincial government should mandate a \$10/hr minimum wage for Ontario now.

Another issue that permeates our everyday life is the environment and what we're going to do to protect it. I produced a 10 page summary (www.michaelwalker.ca) of our climate change problem including 13 recommendations that will help the City update its environmental plan in order to help Canada as a whole meet and beat its Kyoto Protocol carbon-emissions reduction targets. My submission also proposed building a Toronto Environmental Protection Centre as part of our waterfront revitalization; such a centre would provide citizens and businesses with access to information, training, purchase, research, foster technology development, and could aid in monitoring our progress reducing Toronto's carbon-footprint.

And lastly, City Council passed its Capital Budget on March 7th with over half of it going to the TTC. The mayor's priorities seem to be detached from the present context of our city. Our roads are in the worst shape they've ever been in; our parks and forestry issues are being neglected; our

water and sewage system is crumbling beneath our feet; we need new community centres and access to public schools programming space after hours; our waterfront still lays fallow and our world-class transit-hub, Union Station, is a waning opportunity that's wasting away before our eyes. I did not vote for this transit-centric Capital Budget that included extravagances such as another new convention centre at Exhibition Place and upgrades to the Mayor's office.

This Capital Budget authorizes our debt load to grow to \$3.1 Billion by 2011 which translates into \$4000 owed by every citizen. And worse, we'll still have similar conditions of disrepair in 2011 – what happens in 2012? There's simply no fiscal discipline displayed by the Mayor and this Council, and it's going to get us into deeper financial trouble in the long-term.

Please don't hesitate to contact my office at councillor_walker@toronto.ca, www.michaelwalker.ca or call 416.392.7906.