

NORTH TORONTO/VILLAGE POST ARTICLE – April/May 2006

Councillor Michael Walker

Is This City Going As Planned...?

This month's column is aimed at notifying you of various issues affecting St. Paul's.

Many residents in St. Paul's have been contacting my office concerned about City Council's decisions and the new governance changes proposed by the Governing Toronto Advisory Panel. People are concerned that their voice and input at City Hall will become weakened by these changes; many already feel marginalized and that their voices are not being heard, especially on the big issues.

The Governing Toronto Advisory Panel's report recommends the "Strong Mayor" system where the Mayor can personally appoint and dismiss the City Manager, the chairs of council committees, and the members of the proposed Executive Committee of City Council. The proposal is quite radical and has appeared without sound supporting arguments. Former Mayors David Crombie and John Sewell as well as former Chief Planner, Paul Bedford, have spoken out strongly against this proposal.

The governing changes will be discussed at the *Policy & Finance Committee* on May 16, 2006, 9:30 a.m., at City Hall, Committee Room 1. The report has already been endorsed by City Council. You can find the report and supporting information at www.michaelwalker.ca or by contacting my office. Please register to speak or send in your comments to the Mayor and his committee to the administrator Patsy Morris at 416-392-9151 or pmorris@toronto.ca.

There are many different political bents represented at City Hall but the NDP ("New *Development* Party") seems to be quite dominant these days. Many decisions are being made that do not respect our neighbourhoods and sell Toronto short as a whole. Most proposals for tall buildings, even out of the downtown, are supported without a sober second thought. Resident issues of sunlight access and personal privacy are next on the horizon if we do not plan how these tall buildings will work together, let alone the lack of proportionate city service infrastructure and greenspace.

Does anyone see the city getting any cleaner since City Council has been spending millions on the 'Clean and Beautiful City' initiative? I don't. This year, we should be redirecting that money where it is needed more – like fixing our social housing, roads or community programming for our youth.

Does anyone feel we, the residents, have enough control over the planning process in this city? I don't. It's not enacted yet but the City's new Official Plan is already affecting us with fast-paced overdevelopment. The new Official Plan is the tip of the "Intensification Iceberg" – the plan of cramming density in Toronto to raise more taxes and to protect the green belt of the Oak Ridges Moraine. I am thankful for the effort to protect the Moraine although the city's infrastructure is already bursting and the total number of condo units in Toronto has increased by a third in the last 5 years alone.

For instance, just last week, I spoke and voted against a controversial proposal at Yorkville Avenue & Bay Street because it was, at 46 stories with a second tower and podium, too big; the Yorkville neighbourhood and the public school immediately adjacent to this site are too valuable – they need to be respected. The alarming thing is the planner's report supported this development and stated there would be no need for an amendment under the new Official Plan. I was in the minority on that vote and I am trying to educate my fellow City Councillors on the sensitivities and singularities of neighbourhoods like Yorkville in order to understand the necessity to vote in

favour of protecting neighbourhoods in St. Paul's, as well as in Yorkville, whenever an outrageous proposal such as this comes forward in the future.

We all know how many developments are going on around us. A few new proposals are: 359-377 Roehampton Ave. – 4 apartment buildings in a low density residential neighbourhood containing 27 units; 18 Brownlow Ave. – 26 storey infill project next to houses on Soudan Ave.; 609 Avenue Rd. – 17 stories; 215 Lonsdale Rd. – 17 stories.

All these proposals set terrible precedents, constitute bad planning in my opinion, and will destabilize low density residential neighbourhoods, contribute to increasing land speculation culminating in planning for profit as *job #1*. I want to change that mode of thinking.

Please check-out the “Development News” section on my office’s website at www.michaelwalker.ca, email me at **councillor_walker@toronto.ca** or call 416.392.7906.