

## **Opposition grows to Lawrence Heights redevelopment Residents fear strain of increased density**

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By Anna Mehler Paperny

The city is poised to move forward on a long-awaited strategy for Lawrence Heights, the 110-acre social-housing complex it has vowed to revitalize over a 20-year, four-phase period. The development plans, which go before North York community council June 22, make provisions for \$240-million for public infrastructure associated with the plan - from libraries and child care to roads and sewers.

But at the same time, vocal opposition to the plan has been growing among residents around the Lawrence Heights neighbourhood. They argue the plans will wreak havoc on the rest of the area: the 6,300 market-rate units to be added to the 1,208 social-housing units that the Toronto Community Housing Corporation is replacing would make for a total of about 20,000 people.

"We're not against redeveloping Lawrence Heights; we think the city's doing it irresponsibly," said Janet Corey-Skobac. "This is an experiment being put here, and I think not enough thought has been put into it."

Ms. Corey-Skobac has lived in the area since 2000. She sees first-hand the traffic congestion in the commuter arteries around Lawrence Avenue and Allen Road. Residents also fear the strain the increased density will put on aging infrastructure.

Although city staff behind the project note they have been holding consultation meetings since 2008, several residents argue their concerns haven't been addressed. They've collected more than 1,000 signatures on a petition their MP Joe Volpe presented to the House of Commons this week.

"There's going to be a small city built in their backyard," Mr. Volpe said in an interview. "[The neighbourhood] was really built on the premise of suburban living. And so the intensification of that area probably isn't what attracted individuals who bought into the area primarily."

He argued the community isn't opposed to redeveloping Lawrence Heights, a community built in an era when Toronto's social housing was designed to be a world unto itself. A half-century later, that closed-off community had become one of the city's poverty ghettos. Although Lawrence Heights' youth and tenant representatives note things have been getting better - crime is down, test scores are up - the housing is in woeful disrepair.

Ms. Corey-Skobac wants to see the area revitalized. But the proposed density isn't sustainable, she said.

But Gary Wright, the city's chief planner, says the city is prepared to support the influx of new residents.

"We've identified the costs and the requirements necessary to upgrade all of that. We have included in this the transportation upgrades and changes that will be necessary to support that potential community in 20 years from now," he said.

"The process of change is always difficult because people have established communities. We're proposing and recommending significant change," he said. "I think when you look at the time-frame, it helps everyone because it allows people time to absorb and understand the changes in the neighbourhood."