

What's Really Behind the Lawrence-Heights Redevelopment?

Lawrence Heights, designed and built by CMHC in the 1950's, was once deemed a model community. Some characterize it as a dilapidated closed-off fortress of poverty, crime, drugs and violence. I wonder if they have ever been there. I live close by and am there often. There is a vibrant community of diverse people with a strong sense of pride and courage.

Still, there are physical and social problems - mostly associated with the challenges of living under the poverty line. But, the City's "revitalization" plan is about squeezing the most amount of income out of a space they see as "a revenue hole".

Some of the currently 3,000 residents of Lawrence Heights may eventually move into new units that are smaller, stacked, and surrounded by a new city of 25,000 people living in market valued private units – minus the open spaces they now enjoy. So the project is neither about providing social housing, nor about integrating people from differing backgrounds into the surrounding, "mainstream community".

It is really about money! The land value alone is at least \$400 million. Adding 6,300 market-value units, will result in generating an annual property tax revenue base of approximately \$30 million (present value), for city coffers.

But, an aging, overextended infrastructure – roads, sewers, and storm systems – cannot handle the demand. Yet, there is no systematic plan to address or upgrade any of these essential services. Residents south of Lawrence between Caledonia and Bathurst have been complaining of sewer, storm pipe backups and overflows for years!

Moreover, the new development will bring an **additional 21,000 cars** into the area! The City proposes to "reconfigure" arteries like Allen Road, Marlee, Varna, Neptune and Ranee. With so much congestion, the question remains: where will cars go? Not on Lawrence, Avenue Road, Bathurst, Dufferin, Caledonia or Eglinton – there is no capacity. Allen Road is a dead end at Eglinton; Avenue Road, Dufferin and Caledonia effectively at Wilson or 401.

So, the answer is: "on your street." City Council has already begun, surreptitiously, changing designations for certain roads west of Bathurst from "local" to "collector" so as to permit up to 8,000 cars per day on them.

Maybe the citizens of the new city at Lawrence Heights will use the subway, if they're headed downtown. Those trains are already at capacity in peak periods; adding thousands more people is not a solution. By the way, just up the street, at the Allen and Sheppard, on Downsview Park lands, yet another proposal to develop 300 acres for 10,000 to 45,000 people is under consideration. And, another 4,500 residents will occupy the recently approved complex at Dufferin and Lawrence. Will they be told to take the same subway too?

Rather than deal with the issues openly, Municipal Councillors attack concerned views as reflective of “racist” and “apartheid” attitudes.

It’s unacceptable. Honest, tax-paying citizens have a right to say: "Change my neighbourhood? Plan properly and engage my input before moving ahead!"

Hon. Joe Volpe, P.C., M.P.

Eglinton-Lawrence