

City to pick a fight with OMB

Mayor wants to contest ruling on Queen West development: 48 Abell by the numbers

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National Post

Saturday, February 03, 2007

Mayor David Miller will ask city council on Monday to support a battle against the Ontario Municipal Board's decision approving condo developments in the Queen West Triangle, and some councillors see it as a make-or break chance for the future of planning in the city.

Council will be presented with a report outlining the options the city can take against the development, which will see three high-rise condominium complexes erected in the lucrative Triangle area on Queen Street West near Dovercourt Road.

The most controversial building will be constructed at 48 Abell St., where an industrial building has been converted into live-work space for artists. The building, considered by some to be the heart of Toronto's art community, was denied heritage status by city council in November.

Councillor Adam Giambrone, whose ward includes the Triangle, said the city's action will be about more than just this one decision -- it will be about getting Toronto the respect it deserves.

"No other province has a municipal board, no other province has override features. This is about allowing Toronto to do planning that facilitates communities," Mr. Giambrone said.

Developers agree that the city needs to take a second look at its planning process, said David Bronskill, lawyer for Verdiroc Development Corporation, which is developing the 48 Abell lot.

"In Toronto, planning decisions are not always made on basis of planning merits ? the OMB is there to ensure that politics are removed from the process so that planning matters can receive appropriate consideration absent of politics," he said. If the city could remove politics from its planning process, developers would be pleased, he added. "An OMB hearing is an expensive process, and any landowner would want to avoid it."

The city is wasting money by pursuing an appeal that they have "little or no chance of winning," he said, and it is stalling on providing affordable housing to the Queen West



CREDIT: Brent Foster, National Post

Mayor David Miller and some councillors are opposed to a plan to erect three high-rise condominium complexes in the Queen West Triangle, destroying an artists' live-work building in the process.

area.

"This project implements the city's vision," he said, citing the development's inclusion of mixed-use planning that will include artists' workshops, live-work space and a cafe. "I'm disappointed the city is pursuing an appeal instead of promoting that vision and creating a policy basis for it."

Mr. Giambrone said the city has three options for the Queen West Triangle. The first is to take the decision to divisional court, but this can only be done if there was a legal breach in the original process. The second option is for the OMB to decide to review its decision, which is extremely rare, according to the councillor. The final approach available to the city is to appeal to the provincial government.

"None of these things generally happen-- we're really breaking new ground here," Mr. Giambrone said.

Councillor Adam Vaughan said yesterday the "colonial rule" of the OMB isn't the only planning problem the city faces.

"We are hung up on dealing with the height and mathematics of planning as opposed to the social dynamics of neighbourhoods," he said.

Mr. Vaughan also cautioned against the construction of large condominium towers that provide only bachelor or single-bedroom units. He thinks the city needs to start looking at buildings themselves as neighbourhoods -- diverse in both structure and people.

"Something organic like a city has to grow and has to accommodate growth. Growth is a good thing. Height and density are the right things in the right places. We just have to start asking, 'What does the city want out of new growth?' " Mr. Vaughan said.

He hopes council will be able to take that approach if they get the chance to take a second look at development on Queen West.

60-80 Number of units

currently in 48 Abell 500 Estimated number of units in new complex 190 Number of affordable housing units proposed

14&18 Tower heights at

48 Abell on eight-storey base 400 Estimated current number of residents in the Triangle 2,000 Estimated number of new residents under the development plan

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