

Residents association angered by continued push for condominiums on Guild site

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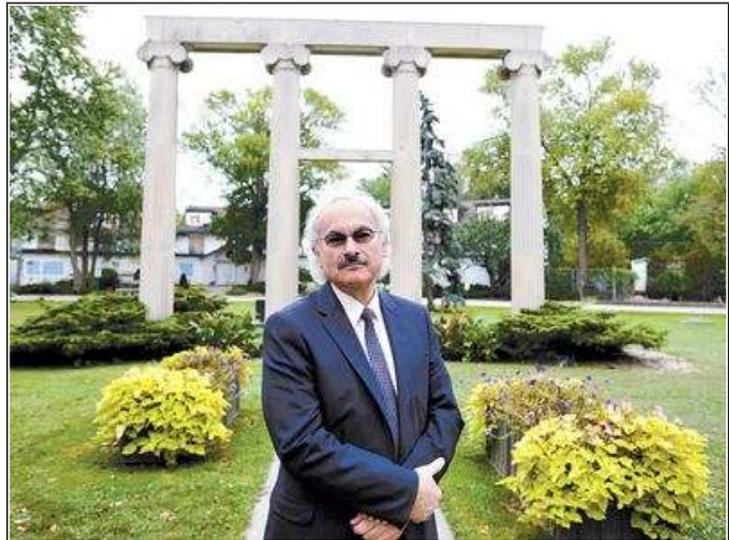
September 29, 2011

After Guildwood's ratepayer group surveyed locals on a weekend last month, it declared the community overwhelmingly against Centennial College's plans to restore the historic Guild Inn by selling land beside it for condominiums.

Local councillor Paul Ainslie said the college could not have a public meeting to present its case and, unless it recanted the condo idea by the end of October, would lose its partnership with the city at the Guild.

But Centennial hasn't given up: recently, a resident who wanted to hear more let the college make its pitch to almost 50 people gathered in her back yard.

The news angered Guildwood Village Community Association President Harry Spindel, who previously said the group would picket any public meeting Centennial tried to hold on the proposal.



Residents association angered by continued push for condominiums on Guild site. Harry Spindel, president of the Guildwood Village Community Association, set against a Centennial College proposal for condos on Guild Inn grounds. *Staff photo/DAN PEARCE*

"At this point cool heads are prevailing, but it wouldn't take much more for us to mount a full campaign" against the college, he said, declining to say what the GVCA has in mind.

"We're bracing ourselves and ready to go at a moment's notice."

It was August 2009 when Centennial and Toronto Council signed a letter of intent to see the college restore the deteriorating former Inn, closed by the city 10 years ago next month, and run a restaurant and conference centre in Guild Park.

But by this spring, Centennial's research convinced the college it can't find anyone to build and operate a boutique hotel on the site, and selling 6.3 acres of the park to develop as many as 100 condo units was "the most responsible option for the college to deliver what the community demands and what the city needs from the Guild," according to a handout participants in last Tuesday's home visit received.

"The City of Toronto is out of money, and the Guild is out of time."

Spindel and Ainslie have said people in Guildwood, including local seniors Centennial suggests will get the first chance to to buy units in the seven to eight storey condo building, are strongly against selling public land for private residences.

Marlene Greening, who invited Centennial representatives to her Greyabbey Trail home, said she doesn't understand opposition to what seems to her a well-planned proposal.

"We get what we want and we have high-end residences for our seniors," she said, adding Guildwood has many older residents whose families have left. They would like to sell their homes but don't want to move far from friends, she said.

The Bickford Residence - the original home at the centre of the former Guild of All Arts - "is going to fall down" and should be restored, said Greening, who doesn't think the condos would interfere with the cultural precinct in Guild Park the city has promised to enhance.

"Who wants strangers (in a hotel) when we can have our own people in there?" she asked. "More people would be walking the park because their friends would be there."

Apart from one woman who "started to shout" at the Centennial representatives and then left, there was enthusiasm from many who attended, Greening said.

"It seems to me that we have more seniors who want to buy than have units available."

She, along with some of her friends, weren't asked by the GVCA what they wanted, she said. "We have to speak up here, because normally we don't"

The written pitch called the condominiums "a slight departure" from what Centennial proposed in 2008 and said the college "hoped to convert opposition to support" in the community.

"For opponents of change, the Guild remains as it was, frozen in time by nostalgia," said the handout, which also suggests demolishing the Inn and landscaping the ground it occupies could put some funding for the park's cultural precinct projects "in peril."

Spindel, who said his group will do whatever is necessary to stop the condos, said there's "no rational reason" for Centennial to continue and he looks forward to hearing proposals from other proponents.

"Clearly they've lost the trust of the community," he said, calling the messages in the handout about opponents "condescending" and disrespectful.

"It just seemed like they're trying to paint us as people who want things to stay the same."

Centennial's proposal won't change, Rosanna Cavallaro, associate vice president of marketing and communications, confirmed this week.

"This is it," she said. "We are leaving it up to the community at this point."

Cavallaro said other private meetings in the community are possible, but reaction from Guildwood will determine what happens next.

The park, though the city maintains its buildings, is owned by the Toronto and Region Conservation Authority.

While stressing the matter hasn't reached the TRCA board and she will reserve judgement until hearing all sides, Gerri Lynn O'Connor, Uxbridge mayor and TRCA chairperson, said she "can't see TRCA letting go of anything" in the park.

"I'm willing to look at anything but we usually work hard to preserve land for public use," she said Thursday.

Many councillors generally defer to their colleagues on planning matters in their wards. Ron Moeser, whose Scarborough ward is east of Ainslie's, said his colleague may not be able to make a decision himself to end negotiations with Centennial on Oct. 31. Scarborough Community Council may give the college more time to work things out, he said.

Ainslie, however, said he was confident the city, after Oct. 31, can simply notify the college "the deal's off" and he will seek to have staff draft a new request for proposals - with tighter restrictions and concrete deadlines - for an operator who will run a restaurant and banquet hall at the Inn, or in a new building replacing it.

"It looks like we're going back to Square One," he said this week.

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