

Outdoor retail goes against Don Mills plan, resident says

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A Don Mills man claims plans to redevelop Don Mills Centre into an outdoor, high-end shopping area go against the Central Don Mills secondary plan, which states development needs to strengthen the mall as a community centre.

Stan Stevenson said under Ontario's planning act, the Central Don Mills secondary plan takes precedence over city bylaws pertaining to planning.

The Greenland Road resident said the secondary plan sets out detailed guidance for development in central Don Mills including, as a specific objective, "strengthening the function of the Don Mills Centre as a community centre."

"We want some community space," said Stevenson, who has lived in the Don Mills Road and Lawrence Avenue area for 23 years. "We want to be able to sit and have a coffee and chat."

The idea of an outdoor retail area is unsettling, he said, noting many of the area's elderly residents prefer a covered mall and Toronto's cold winters wouldn't mesh with an outdoor concept.

"It's been the very centre of Don Mills," he said of the mall, which has been a fixture in the neighbourhood for more than 50 years.

Cadillac Fairview, owners of the Don Mills Centre, plan to close the mall in May to make way for redevelopment, which would include 570,000 square feet of commercial space, 2,600 parking spaces and a 2.7-acre town square.

If all goes according to plan, construction would begin at the end of May. After two years of construction, the new facility is scheduled to open in August 2008.

"Cadillac Fairview is saying they don't need new zoning bylaws, but I'm saying the Central Don Mills secondary plan designates it as a commercial and community centre," Stevenson said. "Everyone feels defeated and I'm trying to say come on boys, it ain't over 'till it's over."

Last month, Stevenson conducted a survey at the Overland Club at Overland Drive and The Donway West regarding the redevelopment plans to see what concerns residents had.

Of the 57 responses, 98 per cent were concerned there are no current plans for a community centre.

Other concerns included lack of input by local residents into proposed plans, lack of public notification of redevelopment plans by Cadillac Fairview, increased traffic and parking and lack of indoor walking space.

Stevenson wasn't alone in his plight as Don Mills resident Simone Gabbay circulated a petition among Don Mills Centre merchants in an effort to save the mall and has collected more than 460 signatures she plans to present to Cadillac Fairview.

Stevenson acknowledged even if city staff turn down the development proposal, Cadillac Fairview could appeal to the Ontario Municipal Board (OMB).

"I think it's a gas people are being fed that nothing can be done," he said.

But Ward 25 Councillor Cliff Jenkins (Don Valley West) said he asked city staff to review Stevenson's position and they verbally expressed he doesn't have a leg to stand on.

"It hinges around the definition of a community centre," said Jenkins, adding he formerly asked staff to review their analysis of the Central Don Mills secondary plan in writing. "Cadillac Fairview's lawyers will argue a shopping centre represents a community centre that he (Stevenson) talks about."

Jenkins said many elderly residents frequent the mall and is aware of the upset the redevelopment plans have caused.

"Don Mills has a large portion of seniors and it seems unfortunate to write them off," he said.

Once the retail aspect of the development is underway, which is known as Phase 1, Phase 2 will begin, which includes the construction of 1,500 condominium units in five- to 15-storey towers on the property.