

Meeting Tuesday to discuss Don Mills Centre's demolition

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Simone Gabbay is not abandoning her quest to fight for the retention of the Don Mills Centre.

The Don Mills Road and Lawrence Avenue area resident has spent months tirelessly collecting names for a petition, which now stands at 4,000 signatures, in an effort to preserve what she calls the "heart and soul" of the Don Mills community.

Cadillac Fairview has proposed to demolish the 50-year-old mall to make way for an outdoor shopping centre, which has angered local residents who want the site to remain covered.

Although nothing is legally stopping Cadillac Fairview from proceeding with its plans for redevelopment, Gabbay is hoping to appeal to Cadillac's "corporate conscience" to work with the community to develop a site that's acceptable to both sides.

Last month, Gabbay sent a letter to Robert Korthals, chair of the board of the Ontario Teacher's Pension Plan, which owns Cadillac Fairview, appealing for the organization to put a stop to the demolition of the mall, noting the Don Mills Centre is an essential part of the community that many families rely on.

In a letter obtained by The Mirror to Gabbay, Deborah Allan, spokesperson for the Ontario Teacher's Pension Plan, said Cadillac Fairview has a management structure and board of directors separate from the Ontario Teacher's Pension Plan and is not involved in the day-to-day operations and management of the company.

"Cadillac Fairview's redevelopment of the Don Mills Centre site is designed to update the property and ensure it remains relevant, while carefully maintaining its heritage as a focal point of Don Mills," Allan wrote. "The reality is that such an extensive redevelopment will take considerable time, with the new centre scheduled for completion in August 2008. Because it is such a comprehensive project, the existing centre must be demolished to allow redevelopment to occur in the most efficient and effective way possible. ... We are confident that the result will be an innovative and revitalized retail, commercial and residential presence, with the services and amenities that will serve you and your neighbours well."

Allan noted the Dominion grocery store will remain open in its current location during redevelopment and the Shoppers Drug Mart will open in a temporary location on site.

Gabbay said the letter sent by Allan did little to address the concerns of the residents, and looks forward to questioning Cadillac Fairview at a community meeting Tuesday.

The meeting, hosted by Ward 25 Councillor Cliff Jenkins (Don Valley West), Ward 26 Councillor Jane Pitfield (Don Valley West) and Ward 34 Councillor Denzil Minnan-Wong (Don Valley East), will allow the public to view the redevelopment plans and ask questions of Cadillac Fairview.

The meeting will be held at the former Inn on the Park, 1100 Eglinton Ave. at Leslie Street, Centennial Ballroom, at 7:30 p.m.