

# Critics' fears fall on deaf ears

FANNIE SUNSHINE

North York Mirror

04/12/06 00:00:00

The ballroom inside the former Inn on the Park hotel might have been packed Tuesday night with emotionally charged seniors who came out to oppose Cadillac Fairview's plans to redevelop the Don Mills Centre, but it seems their pleas failed to sway the corporation off its course.

Residents in the Don Mills Road and Lawrence Avenue area, many of whom are elderly, appear vehemently opposed to Cadillac Fairview's plans to demolish the Don Mills Centre, which has been a fixture in that community for more than 50 years. The demolition would pave the way for an outdoor upscale shopping centre, Town Square and residential space.

Residents have said they want to keep the mall covered and retain a place where they can meet indoors to socialize, which they fear will be taken away with the new design.

The emotionally charged crowd, many of whom immediately booed or loudly interrupted with jeers whenever Cadillac Fairview representatives attempted to answer questions, demanded answers to why the corporation refused to develop a covered mall and why plans to develop a community centre weren't moved up to the earlier phase of the project.

Anne Morash, project manager for Cadillac Fairview, who was flanked by a lawyer and a Cadillac Fairview spokesperson, said the mall was originally designed as an outdoor mall and the last enclosed mall built in Canada, excluding Vaughan Mills, was 15 years ago.

Morash confirmed the Don Mills Centre will close May 31 and Cadillac Fairview is currently negotiating with its tenants and announcements are expected in coming weeks as to where the stores will be relocated.

Ward 26 Councillor Jane Pitfield (Don Valley West), who hosted the meeting along with Ward 25 Councillor Cliff Jenkins (Don Valley West) and Ward 34 Councillor Denzil Minnan-Wong (Don Valley East), said she's made it clear to Morash that a community centre needs to be a priority and including one in the long-term plans is not acceptable.

"Why can't there be a covered area where people can spend time there?" Pitfield asked. "If this has to be the concept, there has to be a place where people can go and spend time. A community centre has to be an up-front promise, not something promised a few years from now."

A Cadillac Fairview representative, suggesting it's the city's responsibility to build community centres, said the new mall will generate \$6 million in revenue for the city. The city can use that money to build a community centre if so desired.

Pitfield said there wasn't money in the city's budget to build a community centre, but was open to the idea of a joint venture between the city and Cadillac Fairview.

One angry resident was frustrated Cadillac Fairview did not appear to take into account the wants and needs of the community.

"A business man who doesn't listen to his customers is a dumb businessman," the man charged. "If Cadillac Fairview doesn't listen something is wrong. Here are all your customers of Don Mills telling you to listen and if you don't listen something is wrong with you."

Simone Gabbay, who circulated a petition and has collected 4,500 names in favour of retaining a covered mall, said the redevelopment plans has "sent shock waves through the community".

"Stores are being forced to close and to look for new facilities," said the Cottonwood Drive resident, who received thunderous applause. "This is Don Mills and we don't want to see it turn into Yorkville. It does not fit in with the community. An outdoor mall will not be successful because it will not serve the needs of the community."

When contacted by The Mirror after the meeting, Gabbay said she found it "unbelievable" Cadillac Fairview could look at a petition with more than 4,000 names and still stick to plans for an outdoor mall.

"It's unbelievably arrogant," she said.

When asked if residents plan to seek legal advice regarding the proposal, Gabbay said there are no plans to do so, adding she will continue to circulate the petition.

Gabbay also expressed disappointment Mayor David Miller did not attend the meeting or send a message through a representative, who was in attendance.

Redevelopment plans for the site include 560,000 square feet of commercial space, 2,050 parking spaces and a 2.7 acre Town Square, which would serve as a skating rink in the winter in the middle of the high-end retail outdoor mall. Heated sidewalks will be installed for easier and safe winter navigating.

Once the retail aspect of the development is under way, which is known as Phase 1, Phase 2 will commence, which includes the construction of 1,200 condominium units in two to 14-storey towers on the property. Cadillac Fairview plans to delve into Phase 2 once Phase 1 plans are complete.

Steve Forrester, city planner, explained to the 800 or more residents who packed inside the Eglinton Avenue and Leslie Street hotel, with dozens spilling out of the room into the hallway, the process which Cadillac Fairview undertook to bring the proposal to its current form.

The corporation submitted its first proposal in November 2001 with the intention to fix up the enclosed mall and to add hotel and residential space. The city hosted a community meeting in June of that year before being informed Cadillac Fairview was putting its plans on hold.

In November 2004, Cadillac Fairview revised its plans to amend the city's official plan and zoning bylaws to add new streets, outdoor retail space and 1,500 residential dwelling units. A community meeting was once again hosted by the city last April but again, Cadillac Fairview put plans on hold.

Then this past November, Cadillac Fairview once again submitted a proposal, but this time it was a site plan control application, which differed from an official plan and zoning amendment, in which it complies with both. Cadillac Fairview also split its redevelopment plans into two phases and while the first phase does not need rezoning or an official plan amendment, the second phase will, Forrester said.

After the site control application was submitted in the fall, the city had five to nine months to process it and make a decision 30 days afterwards, which it did not. Cadillac Fairview appealed to the Ontario Municipal Board (OMB) and a hearing is scheduled May 29 to June 2.

Forrester said he's waiting to hear back from various city departments before he makes a report, which will be brought before North York Community Council May 9, which will outline the city's position at the OMB hearing.