

Don Mills celebrates heritage while work goes on to redevelop area

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By [Sandie Benitah](#)

It's been 10 years since the Don Mills community was recognized for its rich heritage. However, in the midst of a community celebration there is also a struggle these days to protect the community's original identity.

At the same time as the Don Mills anniversary celebration was underway on Feb. 28, another meeting was being held to introduce phase two of the community's reconstruction.

Two tall condos, a multiple-storey parking garage and more retail are included in the plan, as well as a hoped-for new community centre, but some in the area are still reeling from phase one of the project.

"It's like people are given the community centre as a candy to shut them up about the mall," said Simone Gabbay, a Don Mills resident who led the fight to convince shopping mall owners Cadillac Fairview Ltd. to reconstruct the site as a refurbished indoor centre rather than an outdoor complex such as they have planned. "A community centre is not going to affect the way people shop.

"It's not going to take the place of the mall. The mall was a casual meeting place for seniors, (but a centre is) not the same."

Though she collected 5,000 signatures on a petition, her pleas fell on deaf ears as the corporation decided to move ahead with the modern outdoor design instead.

Nonetheless, the evening celebrating the area's heritage was organized partly as an olive branch to Cadillac Fairview and to encourage continuing dialogue with all parties involved.

An executive assistant to Anne Morash, vice president of development for the corporation, was one of about 200 people who attended the celebration, said Gabbay. Better yet, the assistant lives in the area and offered her assistance with future events.

"We welcome the opportunity to connect with Cadillac Fairview," said Gabbay. "The only way we are going to get something out of this is through dialogue."

Gabbay acknowledges there are still some hard feelings in the community.

The latest rumour is about the future of the medical building located at 75 The Donway West, which is also on the site of the former Don Mills Shopping Centre. It was spared from demolition but now there's talk of converting the building into a seniors home.

Several tenants complained to the *Town Crier* in July, 2006 about the building being in disrepair and about the owners not extending leases past 2010. At the time, Cadillac Fairview denied having any plans for the building.

There have also been hard feelings among the residents of Don Mills, a community made up mostly of senior citizens.

Gabbay's group, which calls itself the Concerned Don Mills Residents for Maintaining the Don Mills Centre Indoor Mall, has found itself at odds with Don Mills Residents Inc., the local ratepayer group. An indoor mall has never been a priority for the ratepayer group. They have focused on the greater impact of the reconstruction project, namely intensified traffic congestion and the overall change of the community's look.

Gabbay is not losing hope the community — Cadillac Fairview included — will come together in the end. Recently, Don Valley West MP Kathleen Wynne and opposition leader and the provincial Conservative candidate in the riding John Tory have been in contact with Cadillac Fairview to arrange a meeting.

"The community is changing but I hope (Cadillac Fairview) realizes they need to work with the community," she said. "It might be a dream but I believe people can open their hearts to the situation."

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