

This Week in the Annex:

July 20, 2022

Renoviction Blights the Annex

Regular readers of this newsletter will know well the plight of tenants at 145 St George who live under threat of imminent dislocation. Owners of the building in which many of them have lived for decades have applied to demolish this [Mid-century Modern beauty](#) and replace it with a glass tower almost three times the height.

Regulations require that tenants under such circumstances have the right of return: once the new building is ready, they have the right to be housed in similar units at the affordable rents they had enjoyed up to the time of eviction.

The process is not a simple one and there are negotiations, conditions, and red tape to endure as well as an indeterminate amount of time to be faced languishing in alternate, often more expensive or less convenient accommodations. But the right to return is, in theory, enshrined in law.

Practice versus Theory

We were consequently chagrined to learn that yet more of our neighbours have been facing similar dislocation and anxiety. Our MPP, Jessica Bell, Housing Critic for the Official Opposition, revealed in [her most recent newsletter](#) that tenants at 11 Walmer Road have been anxiously awaiting fulfillment of their right to return to their units after years of major renovations.



11 Walmer Road has clearly benefitted from an extensive makeover both internal and external.

MPP Bell has supported a total of 6 tenants from the time of their displacement in 2019. Apparently, they were given a potential return date of December, 2021. But they're still in limbo more than half a year later, helplessly watching as units are boldly advertised for rent and U-haul vans roll up to discharge the furnishings belonging to newly signed tenants.



The sign advertising vacancies at 11 Walmer offers a QR code for checking availability. We scrambled up to the sign, pointed, and clicked. Sure enough – all unit configurations are listed as available.

When the former tenants recently reached out to management to inquire about their return, they were told that their designated apartments were not yet ready. In the meantime, they have no choice but to hope that their units aren't rented to someone else. Because if this does, indeed, happen, the new tenants cannot by law be displaced, and the original tenants are left with little legal recourse.

MPP Bell says that this issue is unfortunately quite common, particularly in the areas close to UofT. Because of this, she has persistently worked to table [a private member's bill to prevent illegal evictions](#). And now she is asking the public to lend their support by adding their names to [an open letter](#) to the Ford government advocating the protection of these and other tenants' rights.

Vacancy Decontrol

The problem of renoviction is also very much on the minds of City staff. The agenda for this week's final regular meeting of Council (the last before City Councillors morph into election mode) is crammed with a whopping 424 individual items. But one that stands out is [item PH35:18](#) proposing a new policy framework for discouraging renovictions and preventing landlords of rent-controlled housing from increasing rents when units are vacated.

In an article published in [Monday's Toronto Star](#), Victoria Gibson quotes Toronto's top housing official, Abi Bond, as supporting this so called "vacancy decontrol." She recognizes "It's a tricky issue," but she believes that the City should ask the Province to tie rent control rules to residential units, rather than the tenants who inhabit them.

Outcomes

We'll report next week on the outcome of the debate. (Will its fate be yet another request of City staff for "more study" we ask ourselves with a sigh of resignation?) But in the meantime we urge all readers to consider [signing Jessica Bell's letter](#) – or, better yet, penning one of their own in support of our neighbours, the Walmer Road Six.

And we'll let MPP Bell have the final word: *If you or someone you know is a tenant that has been given the runaround regarding your right of return, please reach out to my office at jbelle-co@ndp.on.ca or 416-535-726.*

Notes and Queries

E-Bike Innovation at Spadina & Bloor

Anyone who has watched in dismay as large-capacity delivery vans lumber half-empty through our streets will be encouraged by this next item. The Toronto Parking Authority and Purolator have partnered to launch a six-month pilot project involving the installation of a mini-hub housed in a shipping container located in the Green P parking lot at 19 Spadina Road.

According to an [article from Retail Insider](#), this, together with a soon-to-be-opened second hub, will offer full retail services (for customers to drop off and pick up shipments) and a total of five electric cargo bikes to deliver packages to the surrounding areas. The target is to decrease traffic congestion and CO₂ emissions by 68 tonnes per year.

Thanks are due to Councillor Layton (seen below manning one of the bikes for a photo op at the official launch) for alerting us to this innovative partnership.



Purolator, City of Toronto and Toronto Parking Authority launch Urban Quick Stop pilot program (CNW Group/Purolator)

Have Your Say on Having Your Say

If you've got 10 minutes to spare some time between now and 5 p.m. on Wednesday, August 31, the City would like to hear from you. This past Friday,

staff issued [a press release](#) inviting the public to provide feedback on its public engagement activities via (what else?) an online survey available [by clicking here](#).

The initiative is in response to Council's 2021 directive that staff consider ways of engaging more inclusively with the public. They want to hear not only from those who have engaged with the City in the past but also from individuals who have never before participated. Specifically, they *seek to understand what barriers may have prevented participation and what the City could do to support participation in the future*.

The drive for inclusivity certainly explains some of the options offered as responses to the survey questions like this one below. But it's hard to believe that anyone but comfortably housed, computer-literate, English-speaking residents with easy Internet access will find their way there.



What best describes your current housing situation? Please select one only.

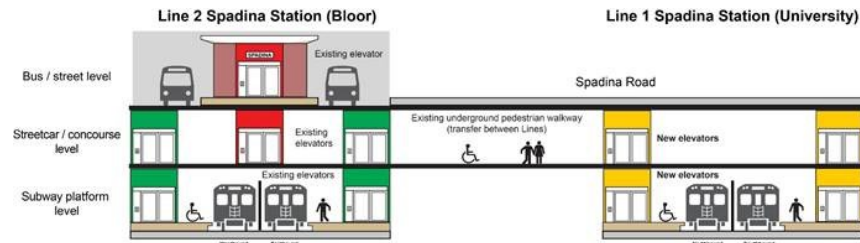
- ☐ Home owner
- ☐ Renting
- ☐ Permanently living with parent(s) or other family member(s)
- ☐ Temporarily staying with others (no fixed address)
- ☒ Homeless (staying outside, in a shelter, in a 24-hour respite)
- ☐ Prefer not to answer
- ☐ Not listed, please specify

TTC Spadina Station Access

Residents at the southern reach of the Annex may well greet with enthusiasm the news that the Spadina subway station is to be retrofitted for easier access. According to the TTC's [pre-construction notice](#), two new elevators are slated for installation at the north-west and south-east corners of Spadina and Lowther. Excavation is to begin this month, and completion is forecast for December 2024.

But do allow us at the northern end of the 'hood to temper any enthusiasm with more than a grain of experience. The 7-year saga of the Dupont retrofit is not yet ended. The open house announcing that particular project was held way back in September 2015, but the long-awaited elevator is still, yet, and again shuttered for fixes.

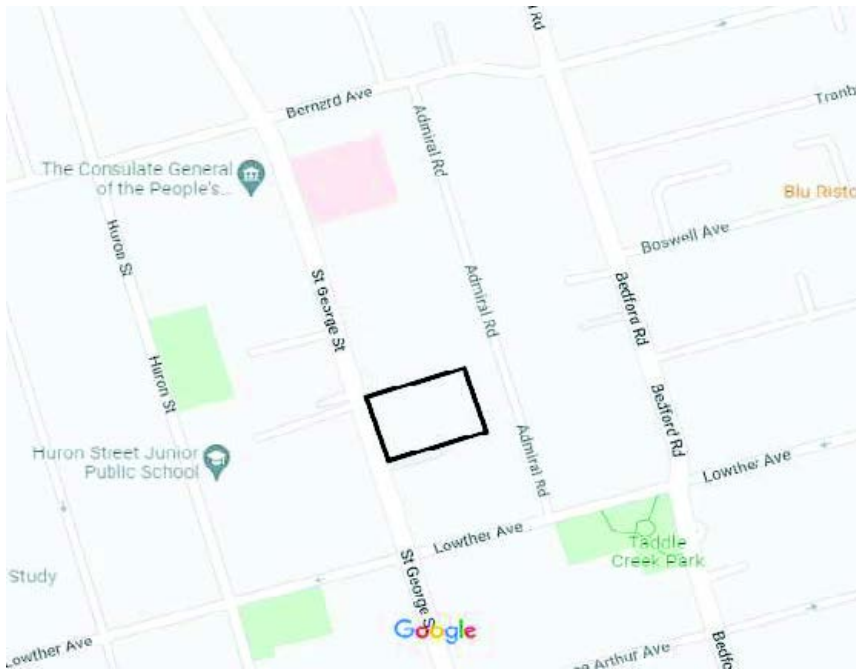
As the TTC notes: the timeline for Spadina access is *subject to weather, unforeseen events, and impact of COVID-19*. No kidding!



Hydro Upgrades

If you're in the quadrant bound by Bernard, Admiral, Lowther, and St George, be aware that Hydro may soon come calling. According to [this construction notice](#), plans are to upgrade the existing electrical distribution system including overhead and underground cables.

You may find yourself required to give crews access to your property in order to connect your electrical meter to the newly upgraded lines. Project start date? Immediate. Project completion date? December of this year. (Subject, no doubt, to . . . *weather, unforeseen events, and impact of COVID-19*.)



Critter Corner ... Literally

The computer-generated description of the following image taken in the early afternoon last week identifies it as: *a picture containing plant, ground, stone, cement*. All of the above are, indeed, in the image. But this alt text misses the key detail down at the bottom – a baby skunk holed up as best it can beneath a basement window.

This little fellow had obviously inadvertently fallen into the window well some time the previous night. A nocturnal creature, all he wanted to do at the time we spotted him was to nap in peace and forget his plight. For proof, just watch [this brief video](#) of his disgruntled struggle at being disturbed. And as you can imagine, we certainly didn't try to rouse him further.

A quick search on Google said that mum would come back in the night to escort sonny home. So we placed a long board in the well as a ramp to provide easy access to the surface and kept our fingers crossed. Absent video cameras we've no idea how the rescue was achieved. But sure enough, the next morning there was only *plant, ground, stone, cement*. Whew!



The Annex Residents' Association is a volunteer organization of residents committed to improving and preserving the distinctive character of our neighbourhood. Our strength depends on our base of support in a well-informed community.

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The Annex Residents' Association