

## **This Week in the Annex:**

**August 31, 2022**

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### **Walmer Road Baptist Under Review**

Participation reached an impressive 65 screens at last Wednesday's ARA community meeting regarding the proposed redevelopment of Walmer Road Baptist. Agreed, the fact that it was held on Zoom allowed for easy attendance – one participant even logged in from Tel Aviv despite the shift in time zones. But to have so many voices present on a late summer Wednesday and on relatively short notice is evidence enough of the importance of this project to our neighbourhood.

Despite the intense interest, this has to have been one of the most well-mannered and restrained public meetings on record. TAS was repeatedly thanked for offering an opportunity for discussion and for the obvious thought that had gone into its proposal. No voices were raised, no fists shaken, no curses hurled.

### **A Near Unanimous Response**

This may have been because the crowd was essentially of a single mind. There was unanimous support for the notion that the church site had to be developed. Not one participant disputed this fact. The crumbling bricks and stresses in the structure are obvious to all. And beyond that, there was essentially unanimous support for the ground floor plans. Most who spoke applauded the accessibility, the amenities, even the courtyard café.

So far, so good.

But the lightning rod for disapproval was the proposed tower. And on that point the audience was also of one voice. In short, the tower is excessively tall at almost 80 metres, and it is unacceptably intrusive on the immediately adjoining properties. Point blank. There's no whitewashing that response.



*In the artistic rendering on the left, the tower is a backdrop to the church. In the technical architectural elevation of the east facade, the tower dwarfs the church.*

## **The Devil in the Details**

TAS expressed some surprise at this reaction, saying that in all the consultation that has gone before, only one group had raised this as an issue, and even then just recently.

This previously muted response can be attributed to the fact that it was only two weeks ago that any of us was privy to the exact details of the plan. Prior to that, there had only been what amounts to pretty pictures.

In fact, even in their opening presentation on Wednesday (the slides for which [are available here](#)), TAS showed nothing of the technical renderings. Nor did they provide views from all perspectives – focussing only on the southern and eastern facades and thus ignoring the all-important issue of transition to the townhouses to the west and the Loretto and its townhouses to the north.

## **Traffic Trauma**

Apart from the height and location of the tower, the problems of traffic flow also drew strong criticism. As was pointed out, the provision of only 3 visitor parking spaces for 162 dwelling units would make current parking wars even more fierce. The traffic generated by those dwelling units – both the private cars of residents and the inevitable flood of commercial vehicles – would exit onto Lowther and funnel directly into Brunswick, already a chaotically busy street.

The study provided by TAS in its formal application suggested that the impact of the anticipated additional traffic would be minimal. However, the developers

acknowledged that the study did not include cumulative data relating to the projects at Bloor and Spadina that are already in the pipeline. And they promised to revisit the report.



*This collage of the two north corners at Bloor and Spadina gives a sense of development already impending. Besides the project at 320 Bloor, there is a companion 98m tower proposed for next door at 316 Bloor. Then, across the way, there is a 118m project under consideration at 350 Bloor. Taken together, these three projects represent an addition of more than 1000 residential units. And this will only be compounded by two more towers of indeterminate height (but extensive square footage) currently contemplated by UofT for the two south corners. See the [March 30 newsletter](#) for more detail.*

## **Preserving the Annex**

TAS made it clear that this was to be just the first of several meetings with neighbourhood representatives. It aims to make this project work for all three parties involved: for itself as the developer, for the Baptist Church as the owner of the property, and for the surrounding community.

That said, we'll leave the last words to loyal Annexonian Bobbi Speck who has lived here for 55 years and who was one of the influential leaders of the Stop Spadina movement. She spoke eloquently at the end of the meeting, capturing perfectly the mood of the audience. You can read the recapitulation of her speech by [clicking here](#). But even just the words of her conclusion will tell you why she earned such a flurry of heartfelt applause in the chat:

*There has been consistent readiness in the Annex to accept more density on an individual project basis. Giant towers are currently being constructed on the periphery, where the arterial roads and infrastructure are being upgraded, and where traffic can be accommodated.*

*But this development on the Walmer Road Baptist Church site is the first to be proposed **inside, within** the neighborhood. As such, it is an inappropriate and extremely dangerous precedent: it violates the fabric of this community which has kept vibrant and able to cope with change without losing its unique and much valued urban character. And it must not happen.*

– Bobbi Speck

## The Vincennes Gets a Topping

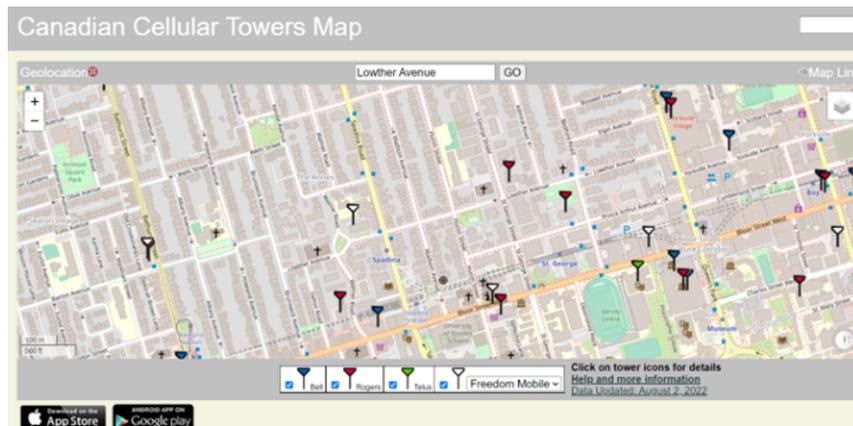
So how's your cellphone reception? If you're with Bell there's a chance you'll get a boost from last Saturday's intervention at Spadina and Lowther. That's when massive flatbeds commandeered the street for the day to install a new cell tower on top of the Vincennes.

The operation proved greatly entertaining for those residents watching from their balconies. Huge blocks of concrete came swinging by, hoisted upwards to the rooftop where workers waited to direct them into position to support the tower, this weighty foundation ensuring that nothing need actually pierce the fabric of Uno Prii's iconic building. (Just in case you wish you'd been there, you can see some of the action in [this video](#).)



On scene was Sergeant Robert Stibbe, hired for the day from the Police Services Division to attend the operation. He assured us that he has never once seen a crane lose its cargo in his 20 plus years on the job. Comforting.

What he has witnessed, on the other hand, are failures in measurement. It takes several hours right at the worksite to assemble a crane, and he was present once when one came up ten feet too short, the error costing over eighty thousand dollars and weeks of lost time in re-scheduling and re-application for permits. More common are issues with orchestration: the flatbed carrying materials for this job arrived three hours too early and consequently illegally clogged Lowther east of Spadina until it could move into position. No parking ticket was issued.



We were told that the tower was for Bell customers, but there were no Bell logos in evidence. That drove us in an idle moment to check [a map of cellular towers in Canada](#). You can see the Lowther location marked above – but with a white icon indexed to denote a Freedom Mobile tower. Freedom is affiliated with Shaw which is possibly going to merge with Rogers. . . Can it be that Bell is trying to get a step ahead of its competitors? As we said, it was an idle moment. You can check that website in a few weeks' time to see whether the Bell tower has been added.

## Notes and Queries

### Walking the Talk

There's been a lot of noise recently about the City getting to net zero by 2040, but until now, that has seemed a pipe dream to many. That's why we were impressed to see our own Councillor featured in Saturday's *Toronto Star*. On May 25, Mike Layton and his wife Brett Tryon realized a long-held dream — Enbridge

Gas cut them off, and now they're running their house, summer and winter, without fossil fuels.

If you're a Star subscriber, you can read the highly informative two-page spread [by clicking here](#). But if not, [here's a pdf](#) summarizing the steps the couple took to green their home and wean themselves off gas.



## Bumps on the Election Road

It's been less than a fortnight since registration closed for the October municipal election, but already two contenders have withdrawn their candidacy in University-Rosedale: Diana Yoon and Ann Rohmer. While their names will appear on our ballots, there are actually only twelve (!) in contention. (You can read [the full list here](#).)

In other changes, you've likely already received notice that federal electoral boundaries are about to be re-drawn. FoNTRA, the umbrella Toronto residents' association, [urges you to participate in the discussions](#), particularly given that the city is about to lose one of its wards – shrinking from 25 to 24 seats.

All this and campaigning is barely underway. . .



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