

This Week in the Annex:

December 20, 2023

Vacant Home Tax Declaration Due

If you're one of the roughly 70% of Annex residents who rent their homes, feel free to skip down to the last section of this item. But if you own your own property, read on.

The onset of the vacant home tax last year created a significant amount of confusion, not to say angst, amongst many Annex property owners. Things should go more smoothly for the vast majority of us this year. But do note that even if the status of your property hasn't changed, it doesn't matter: **You are still required to submit a formal declaration annually** – the deadline for this year being **February 29, 2024**.



Alas this erstwhile beauty at 63-65 Kendal continues to languish unoccupied. The vacant property tax doesn't seem to have impelled the owners to action.

If you owned property in 2023, you (or an authorized relative or friend) can declare the occupancy status through the secure online portal available on the City's [Vacant Home Tax webpage](#). Alternatively, you can submit a completed paper declaration form available at customer service counters at Toronto City Hall or by contacting 311.

So even if you're still residing in the same property (we ourselves have been here 35+ years and aren't for a moment thinking of budging) you've got to do the paperwork. It's quite possible a blank form might arrive in the new year together with your tax bill. But why not get this bit of adminstrivia done with while you're thinking about it?

Online Declarations

To make the declaration online, you'll need to have the following on hand:

- Assessment Roll Number, found on your property tax statement
- Customer Number, found on your property tax statement
- If applicable, documents required to show your [Vacant Home Tax Exemption](#)

Once you're ready, click on over to <http://www.toronto.ca/VacantHomeTax> where, after entering the requisite identifying information, you'll be asked the critical question:

Was this property the principal residence of the owner for at least six months?

If the answer is yes, Bingo! You're done. If not, things get a bit more complicated – and we leave that to you to sort out.

But for you snowbirds, just in case you're worried, there's a comforting bit of commentary on the City's website:

The Vacant Home Tax allows for owners to be away from their principal residence due to travel, work and other reasons for extended periods of time.

*The declaration form asks if the property was the principal residence of the owner for at least six months. **The six-month stipulation refers to the property being your principal residence for this period of time and not your physical occupancy of the property.** As long as a property remains your principal residence you can declare the occupancy status as occupied.*



So there you go you home-owning snowbirds. Off to sunshine with impunity!

Preserving Affordable Housing

In its first year of implementation, nearly 45,000 property owners initially ignored the declaration process. They soon learned that was a bad move. The City automatically deemed their properties vacant, and they received hefty property tax bills as a result.

Clearly the extra tens of thousands of dollars involved concentrated delinquent owners' minds. By August the numbers had shaken down through the appeals process to 17,437 properties deemed vacant in 2022. And that resulted in a tax windfall for the City of \$54 million.

According to a motion passed in October at Toronto City Council, the ultimate goal of the tax is not so much to raise revenue as it is to reach zero. In other words, its aim is to ensure that Toronto's entire housing stock is occupied and not languishing vacant.

That said, any funds raised from this extra tax will be directed towards [the City's MURA program](#) – a fund designed to preserve the existing supply of affordable rental housing by having the City purchase market rental buildings in danger of being converted to condos. Alas, the program is too late for 145 St. George Street. But it may well save other housing stock in the Annex.

To read CP24's full report, [click here](#).

What Price Sunshine?

The Committee of Adjustment showed some spine two weeks ago when it turned down an application from the developers of the Bloor Street United Church property to plop another few storeys *ex post facto* onto their tower. Alas, the situation was reversed last week when an application by the developer at 316 Bloor was given passage, albeit reluctantly.



The debate was close at the hearing on December 13, 2023, but the Committee of Adjustment ultimately awarded an increase of 7 storeys to a soaring 36 for the developer of Bloor and Madison.

A Brutal Afternoon

It's small comfort, but the discussion was by no means perfunctory. Presentations were made by Terry Montgomery for the ARA, Ellen Valter for KESKUS (the Estonian Centre), and two local residents.

The Chair noted there were many of objections filed (at least 20 separate letters), and the member who voted against the variances to do with increased height and increased residential capacity noted that the number of objections shows that to the people who live in the area, the variances were not trivial.

In other words, filing objections CAN have an impact. We must never simply collapse in the face of a developer's application, even if the planners at City Hall refuse to engage in the fight.

That said, the fix is in. The vote was two to one, with the Chair abstaining. The developer can go higher.



For the moment the site is open to the skies as crews demolish existing structures. Enjoy the sunshine while it lasts.

Notes and Queries

So Was It Worth It?

We have learned that *Fellow Travellers* – which shut down Annex streets and was filmed (in part) at Spadina Gardens – is now available on either *Showtime* or *Paramount Plus*. The mini-series stars Matt Bomer and Jonathan Bailey as lovers whose relationship stretches from the Red Scare of the 1950s into the early years of the AIDS epidemic under Ronald Reagan.

We ourselves don't have a subscription, so we're in the dark as to whether Spadina Gardens or even the Annex qua Annex made the cut. According to our inside source, industry reviews are a bit mixed. ["Vital and stodgy by turns"](#) (or something like that) says *The Hollywood Reporter*. Others suggest the series is quite good with lots of hot gay sex. But if you do happen to encounter the show, we'd love to know. Is the 'hood identifiably on screen? That might make up for the astonishing disruption of the film shoot. Or, on the other hand, possibly not.



Is There Life Without Internet?

A few Annex residents came face to face with that question last week when they were unceremoniously disconnected from Bell's Internet service at 11:37 am on Tuesday the 12th. Well, it wasn't TOTAL surgery. Bell quickly offered affected customers 50 extra gigs on their cellphones. But it did take an agonizing 48 hours of working with clumsy thumbs and tiny screens before service was restored.

Naturally one's immediate response is to ask who was at fault. Bell workers on site (manning the fleet of vehicles in the image below) initially pointed the finger at the TTC and its work on elevator access at the Spadina subway station. But when confronted with that claim, the TTC spokesperson unequivocally denied responsibility. In the end, who cares? Connection was restored by noon on Thursday. All is well.



Christmas Shutdown

It seems there's no escaping construction in the Annex. But two projects sponsored by the City are observing a welcome stoppage for the holidays. Most significant and long-lasting is the hiatus on Bloor Street where crews collected bollards and swept up debris last week to render the road open for traffic until Spring (check the spanking new pavement in this video).

For those at the top end of the Annex on Huron, welcome relief is promised for tomorrow, Thursday, as crews clean up to shut down for the Christmas break. The past few weeks have by all accounts been excruciating for local residents, the most oppressive feature being the sound of the generator running 24/7. That said, without that generator those homes would have no power. Far worse than losing Internet for 48 hours, wouldn't you say?

Crews will return in the New Year for a projected two more weeks of work to finish installing the upgraded service.



Until Next Year

Well, if the construction crews can pack up and go home, we guess that that gives us licence to do the same. For while we take enormous pleasure in writing this weekly newsletter and in celebrating the 'hood (*pace* those few of you who still wince at the term) it's true that everyone needs a break.

But we can't sign off without first telling you how much we appreciate your emails and support, how chuffed we are that the newsletter rates a close to 80% open rate weekly, and how proud we are of the community in which we live. Best wishes to all Annexonians for a safe, healthy, and happy holiday. Take care. See you in (how did it get here so fast?) 2024.



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