

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

**January 17, 2024**

---

### **What Were They Thinking?**

It was empowering to see so many residents in attendance at last Thursday's ARA Board meeting. And, truly, it was a jam-packed session not to be missed.

But of every item on the agenda, the one that elicited the greatest response was the presentation by Paul Scrivener and Kevin Tuttle on behalf of SoFra — the Sorority and Fraternity Association of Toronto. The two "brothers" came to witness for the unique family structure of the frats, the consequent inappropriateness of municipal regulation, and their desire instead to open lines of communication with Annex residents to resolve any issues and concerns.

### **What They Argued**

Mr Tuttle's somewhat maudlin testimony as to the enduring importance of fraternity in his own life and the family comfort of communal cooking found little sympathy in the audience. But history indicates this is one of SoFra's key arguments against regulation: the practice of communal living demonstrates there is no landlord tenant-relationship in the frats. Rather, the inhabitants — the "brothers" — are merely part of one large and happy family.



*The bid to regulate frat houses has long roots. Even the [University of Toronto's student newspaper](#) favoured the move.*

A second argument historically proffered by SoFra against regulation is that licensing frats “could result in hundreds of SoFra members forced out of their residences and becoming homeless, thus [exacerbating] the homelessness crisis.” (Scroll down to page 8 of this [supplementary report from the City](#) to find the quote.)

They have also argued darkly in the past that “. . . there are forces that are pursuing SOFRA houses for increased gentrification, and wish to push out students in need of affordable accommodation from a community that SOFRA houses have been a part of since 1879.” (See the final paragraph of lobbyist [Peter Milczyn's letter to the City's Planning and Housing committee](#).)

But the chief reason for rejecting regulatory oversight, the two men advised, was that inspection as multi-tenant housing would do nothing to solve the real issues of concern to Annexonians — unruly behaviour, excessive noise, and so on.

Indeed, said they, the only effective solution was to open lines of communication between us and them with regular meetings scheduled on a — wait for it — four-month basis.

## **What We Asked For**

To say that these remarks were received sceptically by those in attendance at the meeting is an understatement. But if open communication was to be the answer, Board members then pressed the brothers for three main items:

- their private telephone numbers that Annex residents could call whenever there was a crisis, even and especially in the early morning hours
- a list of the names and telephone numbers of the responsible heads of each of the 19 frat households in the Annex
- a clear and convincing explanation as to just why SoFra is so allergic to municipal regulation

Not surprisingly, we hit a wall on all three counts.



*To be sure, many of the frats — like house proud Alpha Phi pictured above — make model neighbours. They should have no fear of inspection.*

## Next Steps

Mssrs. Scrivener and Tuttle retired somewhat abashed from their chilly reception at the meeting. But the fact is that SoFra and its chief lobbyist, Peter Milczyn, have already begun the campaign down at City Hall to quash [Councillor Saxe's request to revive the issue](#).

They have started pestering our councillor's colleagues on the Housing and Planning Committee (H&P), urging them to refuse her bid to get the item on the agenda. And in case that ploy fails, they have set the host of fraternity brothers on high alert to send a blizzard of negative letters.

Peter, a former councillor, MPP, and cabinet minister who knows his way around the corridors of power, was ranked by Matt Elliott as the 12<sup>th</sup> most active lobbyist in 2023. He's a formidable foe. And all we have in our corner is a councillor who is not actually on the H&P committee but out there alone championing the

cause of a comparative handful of beleaguered residents. She needs and deserves our support.

## Make Your Voice Heard

The ARA has already sent a letter to the Planning and Housing Committee (P&H), copied to Councillor Saxe and Mayor Chow, that you can read by [clicking here](#). And at least a dozen ARA members have already written or promised to write their own messages of support. But we need far more than that if we're to make a significant dent in the avalanche of mail that we anticipate coming from the other side.

So here's the ask. If you've ever been adversely affected by a neighbouring frat house and would like to see it regulated under Toronto's Multi-tenant bylaw, then please do fire off an email in support of our Councillor's move. It should be sent not only to her ([councillor\\_saxe@toronto.ca](mailto:councillor_saxe@toronto.ca)), but also to Mayor Chow ([mayor\\_chow@toronto.ca](mailto:mayor_chow@toronto.ca)) and Councillor Perks ([councillor\\_perks@toronto.ca](mailto:councillor_perks@toronto.ca)), the head of the all-important P&H.

Your letter asking them to re-open the issue doesn't have to be long. Indeed, you might simply pose the question that puzzles us all — **What is the real reason why these brothers are so ferociously opposed to regulatory oversight when its sole purpose is to ensure safe living conditions for their residents?**

## When Contractors Come Calling

The following article is from *The Republic*, the newsletter of the feisty Rathnelly Residents' Association up north of us. Author and editor Murray Campbell generously gave us permission to reprint this cautionary tale from their December issue.



***Be careful about impromptu house renovations.***

*Several recent incidents in the neighbourhood suggest residents should be cautious about using work crews who solicit business door-to-door. In the most serious, a*



*homeowner engaged a crew to do work on a chimney and then was told there had been a fire in the attic and that major repairs needed to be done. After several days of "repairs" and payment of a "substantial" bill, the homeowner discovered that the workers had done none of the repairs they had suggested needed doing and — quite the reverse — might have caused the so-called damage. Police have told the homeowner that they will investigate.*

*In a second case, a crew started to replace the roof of a house and were quickly fired but not before causing substantial damage that needed to be remediated by a reputable roofing firm. The bill from the reputable firm was a fraction of what the first crew had demanded. In a third case, a crew solicited work to repoint the brickwork of another house. The repointing was done very quickly, but, despite promises, no receipt for payment was ever provided.*

*The crews are possibly linked. In any case, their modus operandi is to knock on a door and tell the homeowner that they were working in the neighbourhood and could quickly repair something that they had noticed on a roof or elsewhere. The man doing the talking will have an Irish or Scottish accent. Business cards left after the work was completed were for fictitious firms such as "Ontario Roofers" or "Superior Masonry" and displayed telephone numbers not in service. They used what appear to be stock photos to show their past work.*

*The lesson from this is to ensure you only deal with firms that provide documentation about HST, WSIB and show a business licence. As well, check any references provided. Most contractors in the city have more work than they can handle and do not solicit door-to-door. So, beware when someone comes knocking.*

We know that the contractors described in this article have knocked on a few Annex doors as well. If you've got a similar story to tell, let us know at [info@theara.org](mailto:info@theara.org).

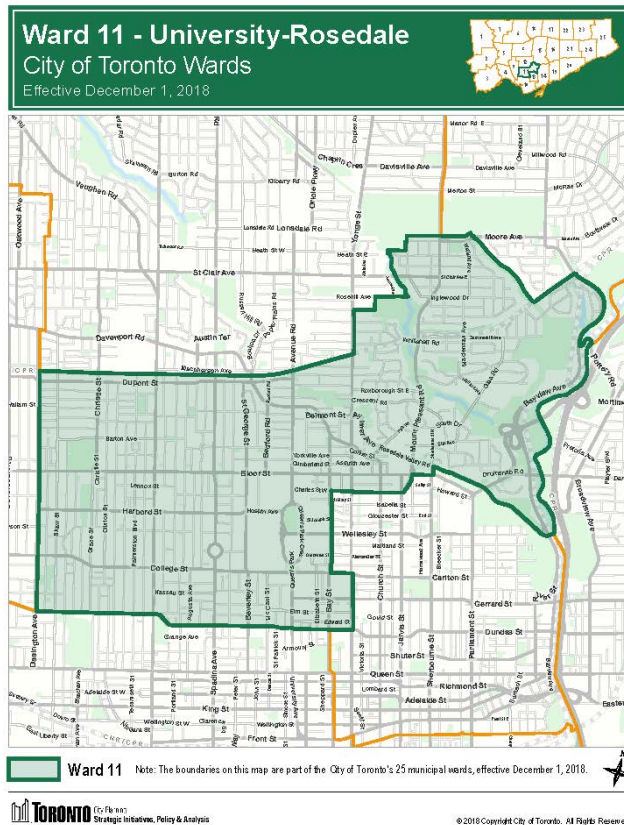
## **Notes and Queries**

### **From the Councillor's Desk**

During our Board meeting last Thursday, Councillor Saxe gave a high-level review of her work at City Hall. Currently, the lion's share of her time is taken up with the budget: as she ironically noted, if you are in need of a cure for insomnia,

just read through [the full budget document](#). But there's a lot more on her plate, as well, related to business in Ward 11.

[Click here](#) to read the Councillor's January newsletter. And consider going to her Town Hall tomorrow evening — **Thursday, January 18th** from 7:00 to 8:00 pm. The focus this time will be on auto thefts. You'll find the appropriate registration link her newsletter.



## Warming Centre at 136 Spadina Road

The City's newest warming centre opened this weekend right in the heart of the Annex at **136 Spadina Road**. Given the number of people in our neighbourhood who are facing precarious housing, the centre is a most welcome addition. It is pet-friendly and equipped to serve up to 23 vulnerable residents at a time. Walk-ins are welcome. And apart from a place to rest and get warm, they will find meals, washroom facilities, and referrals, if need be, to emergency shelters.

The centre is in a house situated on the west side of Spadina Road, between Dupont and Bernard. Good information to have at your fingertips in case you encounter someone in need.



## Game On April 1<sup>st</sup> — No Fooling!

Well, that call surely rang out loud and clear. We had a most gratifying reaction to the proposal last week that the ARA host a community evening for residents to socialize over a variety of games. There were calls for Scrabble, euchre, bridge, and canasta — that last a heartfelt plea from parents of active toddlers who recognized that their hope for a free night out was 100% aspirational but sure wanted to try for it all the same.

So we're on! Mark **Monday, April 1<sup>st</sup>** on your calendars for a delightful two hours of diversion, most likely at the Friends' House at 60 Lowther. Watch for more details closer to the event. (And get those babysitters lined up early.)



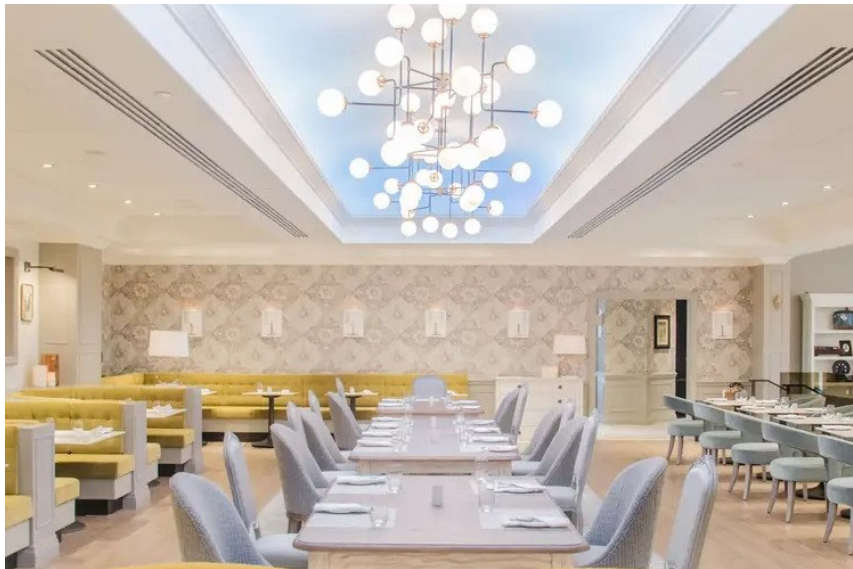


## But We Can Always Meet 'n' Eat Too

You may not have a predilection for games, but surely everyone needs to eat. That's why Fiona McHugh has kindly volunteered to organize another ARA Meet 'n' Eat after the success of last August's event at Indian Desire on Bloor Street.

So let's start with Winterlicious. Have you wanted to try Signatures Restaurant in the Royal Sonesta Hotel on Bloor Street near Avenue Road? Well, here's the perfect opportunity to do so as they are participating in this year's festival with a [fixed price menu for \\$55](#) (exclusive of drinks, tips, and tax).

So here's the plan. If you are interested in joining a group of ARA residents at Signatures, we propose organizing a Meet 'n' Eat there for **Wednesday, February 7<sup>th</sup>**. Please RSVP by [clicking on this link](#) by **January 24<sup>th</sup>** at the latest. And if we have at least 10 people signing on, we'll go ahead and book a group table. Up to you!



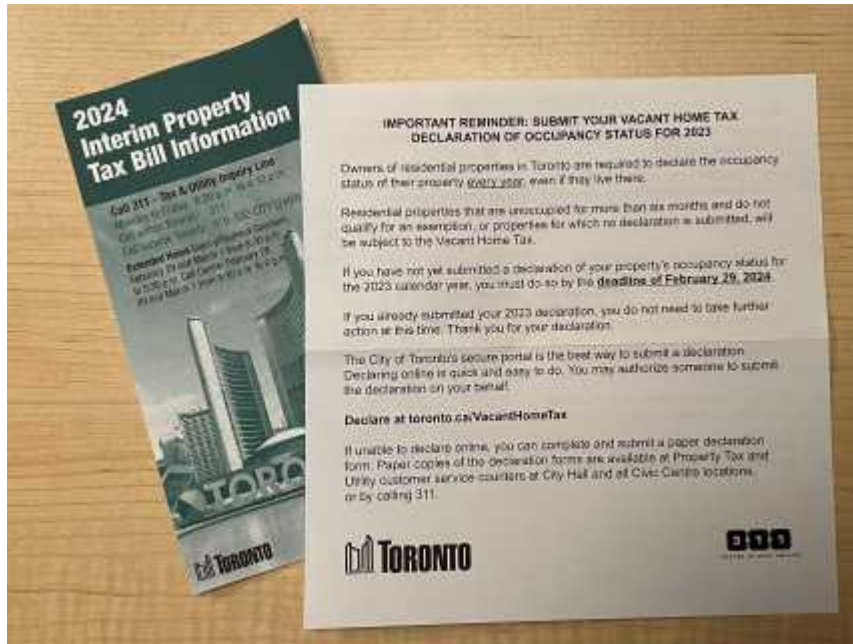
## Did You Declare You're Occupied?

We gave property owners a heads-up last December that it was time to register their homes as occupied (or not) for the year 2023. By now you should have received an interim tax bill accompanied by an innocuous insert, pictured below, that delivered the same message but might easily be missed.

For full details on how to register, you can consult our [December 20 newsletter](#). Or if you're tech savvy and confident about working through the process on



your own, you can get started here: <https://www.toronto.ca/services-payments/property-taxes-utilities/vacant-home-tax/>.



## Those Were the Days?

Yesterday (January 16) ARA member John McGrath spotted [Toronto Public Archives' release](#) of an image made exactly 110 years previously. Taken in 1914 from the site of what is now the Tollkeeper's Cottage, the photograph captures the view looking southeast towards the intersection of Davenport and Bathurst. You can just make out the Annex in the misty (or is that smoggy?) background. The horses may look picture-postcard romantic, but in temperatures like these we'll take an Uber any day. Thanks, John, for sending.



City of Toronto Archives, Fonds 1231, f1231\_it0262



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.

This email was sent to [gillianbartlettara@gmail.com](mailto:gillianbartlettara@gmail.com). To stop receiving emails, [click here to unsubscribe](#).

The Annex Residents' Association