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— *Brad J. Lamb*, developer involved in 224 King Street condo project

Community council rejects King St. tower

HEIGHT AN ISSUE

OMB may decide future of condo development

BY NATALIE ALCOBA

City councillors yesterday rejected an “astonishing” 45-storey condo tower by prominent Toronto architect Peter Clewes, airing concerns about height and how it would impact its neighbours.

The tower, proposed for a parking lot next to the Royal Alexandra Theatre, is a collaborative project between

Mr. Clewes, developer Brad J. Lamb, who owns the land, Niche Developments and HarHay Construction Management.

Mr. Lamb and Mr. Clewes were on hand to hear the decision by Toronto East York Community Council. They have already taken the proposal to the Ontario Municipal Board, which has the power to approve it over the city's wishes.

Local councillor Adam Vaughan was among those who voted against the project, despite praising several aspects of the proposal. He said 224 King Street has an “astonishing” design, with many features that the city should encourage, namely a public square out front that gives the historic theatre a position of prominence.

“The trouble with setting the building back is that you automatically push the massing somewhere else, up. And the question is how far up,” he said.

His concerns were not limited to height. Mr. Vaughan said as more real estate is transformed into high-density condos, the tax assessments for nearby historic warehouses have gone through the roof.

“Assessments in this area have jumped from \$8- to \$23-million overnight ... effectively [giving an incentive for the] demolition of buildings which are sometimes heritage listed. It's literally bankrupting landowners in this area.”

He said he will oppose the development for now, but wants staff to report on what additional protection could come if the area were designated a heritage conservation district.

Afterward, Mr. Vaughan said such a designation would protect heritage, while unleashing parking lots for higher density development, provided they “pay respect” to the character of the neighbourhood.

He added: “It still does not answer the tax policy.”

He said if the city approves this condo tower, it is saying all properties on this strip have a right to 40 storeys “and they don't.”

Jeffrey Davies, a lawyer representing the owners of buildings immediately to the east, said his clients opposed the project.

Mr. Lamb said the verdict was not surprising, but he is optimistic a building will eventually go up. He has argued that height is a “non-issue” because there are a stack of approved tall buildings in the vicinity.

“I don't see us changing the design dramatically, the point is the forecourt is important for the city,” he said, adding that the Mirvish family, which owns the Royal Alex, has supplied the developers with a letter of support.

“In the event we can't make some compromise with the city, we will fight them at the OMB.”

Eileen Costello, a lawyer representing the developers, argued that the tower would not set a precedent because it is not a heritage property, and the heritage properties to the east would be restricted by the same legislation that protects them.

“It's very easy to react viscerally to this building without looking at this project as a whole,” she said.

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nalcoaba@nationalpost.com

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nalcoaba@nationalpost.com



An artist's rendering of the proposed 224 King West condo tower project.

ARCHITECTSALLIANCE

COMMENT

Toronto: not as cheap as advertised

A German investment banker is providing a peek into how the financial-services world sees Toronto. The unidentified banker — based in London for many years but now in Toronto — is writing about his experiences for hereisthcity.com, an influential U.K.-based financial services website. You can get a sense of his attitude by his pseudonym: Polar Roller. His latest entry, titled “The Great Canadian Rip-Off,” came on Monday, as Premier Dalton McGuinty spoke of his plan to improve Toronto's position as a global financial services hub:

Canada, so I was told before moving, is 30% cheaper than the U.K. Maybe that referred to their taste in wines, because it certainly doesn't refer to the cost of living.

Preparing for the negotiations of my relocation package, I did the responsible thing and looked up comparisons of the cost of living in London and Toronto. As a result, I had reliably established that the latter would be about 30% cheaper than my old home. The source for this information was a report by a major accountancy firm. (Ever since Enron, I should know better than to trust anything that comes from one of those.)

Everybody knows that London is a rather expensive city to live in, but realistically, when you go out to grab something for lunch to bring back to your desk, the damage is rarely bigger than £5. In Toronto, it quickly transpired that you can't get by on less than a Canadian tenner. At the going rate, that is about £6, which in my book is a surcharge of 20% rather than a 30% discount. In London, our cleaner was £10/hour. In Canada, she's \$20. Two litres of milk? Less than £2 in the U.K., \$5 in the provinces.

There is no need to reiterate the well-documented example of the two beers for \$28 [in a January post about his trip to a Maple Leafs game], but since this was a corporate-style sporting event, things are expected to come at a premium.

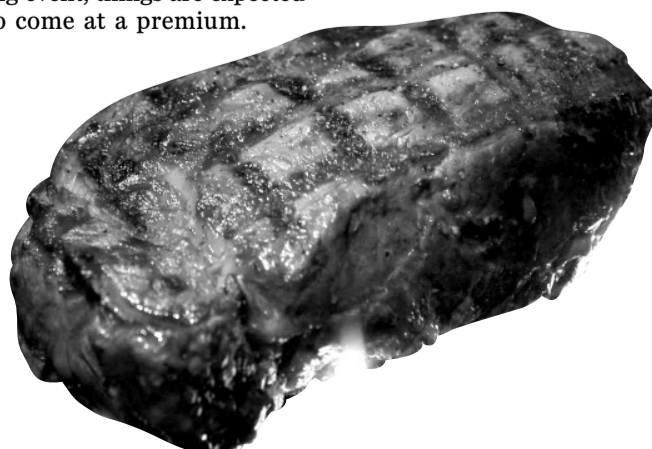
Not so, you would expect, when you go grocery shopping.

My wife brought back two (small) steaks, which the (grocery store) butcher had highly recommended for the beef being grass fed and not having been treated with antibiotics. When finding them in the fridge with the price tag of \$30 still attached to them, I was the one ready to be treated, not with antibiotics, but at least with antidepressants. Surprising, also, how the absence of medication increases the price of a product. Maybe that is socialized health care for you.

Not only in comparison to the U.K., Maple Leaf nation comes across rather expensive. Our magazine subscriptions arrive with imprints of the sort “4.95 USD / 5.95 CAD” when the Canadian dollar is close to parity with the USD. That makes the 90-minute trip across the border all the more appealing and unsurprisingly so, the parking lot of the closest U.S. Wal-Mart shows an abundance of Ontario licence plates on weekends.

Maybe, by some miracle, the GBP will make a recovery and climb back to the jolly heights of \$2 to the £1 which, of course, would make my daily sandwich so much cheaper in comparison. Since, however, my bonus is nowadays CAD denominated, I would have to buy a lot of sandwiches before we move back across the Atlantic to get the benefit of that.

National Post



Councillor urges Transit City freeze

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

BY ALEX WRIGHT

A Toronto city councillor is proposing a freeze on planning for the TTC's massive light-rail expansion, to review contracts and procedures, after a manager steered a \$50,000 contract to a female friend.

“What has been exposed about subcontractors could be just the tip of the iceberg and I want to feel confident that the whole system is working properly, that people are getting the jobs properly,” said Councillor Gloria Lindsay Luby (Etobicoke Centre). “I don't have any assurance that all of these safeguards are in place.”

John Cursio, former project manager for the \$8-billion Transit City light-rail plan, recommended that transit con-

tractor AECOM Canada use West Point Photography, owned by Mr. Cursio's friend Robin Thoen, as a subcontractor.

“We acknowledge that there was a conflict of interest that should have been declared,” TTC spokesman Brad Ross said yesterday. “Billings that crossed Mr. Cursio's desk related to West Point Photography should not have been signed by him because of that conflict.”

Mr. Cursio is no longer an employee of the TCC, Mr. Ross said.

Ms. Lindsay Luby, in a letter to city council, proposed a freeze on all current bids and pending contracts. She plans to raise a motion at the next city council meeting to request that the TTC develop a more accountable procedure.

“All of the big contracts are very transparent, it's the small ones that aren't,” she said.

Mr. Ross said the TTC will be strengthening its conflict of interest and procurement policies. Management will be required to read and sign copies of the policies annually, and adherence to them is already a condition of employment at the TTC, according to Mr. Ross.

Mr. Ross said that the TTC is conducting an audit of its dealings with West Point Photography to ensure it received value for money.

National Post

I was not armed: Creba accused

BY SHANNON KARI

One of two men on trial in Jane Creba's death testified Tuesday he was unarmed and afraid for his life when the Yonge Street shootout took place on Boxing Day 2005.

“I just heard pop, pop, pop, pop, pop,” Louis Raphael Woodcock said as he described the gunfight outside a downtown Foot Locker store. “I was so scared. I thought I was going to die. I just ran.”

Mr. Woodcock, 23, and Tyshaun Barnett, 22, are each on trial on a charge of second-degree murder. They are accused of firing handguns during the shootout between two rival groups. The shot that killed Ms. Creba as she crossed the street, was “almost certainly” fired by Jeremiah Valentine, the jury has heard. Valentine has pleaded guilty to second-degree murder and was sentenced to life in prison.

The Crown closed its case this week and the defence began yesterday with the testi-

mony of Mr. Woodcock, who wore a dark suit, bright red tie and spoke in a soft voice on the witness stand.

The jury heard that Mr. Woodcock had a prior conviction for cocaine trafficking. He repeatedly denied any involvement in the Creba death.

Instead, the defendant implicated Valentine and Jorrell Simpson-Rowe as the instigators of the gunfight. Simpson-Rowe was convicted by a jury of second-degree murder in December, 2008. Both Woodcock and Simpson-Rowe are alleged by the Crown to have used the same 9mm handgun during the shootout.

Mr. Woodcock testified that on that day, he unsuccessfully tried to get a discount on a pair of Air Jordan basketball shoes at the Foot Locker, then saw “some dude” walk outside with the nozzle of a gun poking out of his sleeve.

“He said, is this your boy. This is my boy, a .357,” said Mr. Woodcock, in reference to the gunman, who the jury was told was Valentine. Woodcock testified that he had never previously seen Valentine.

“He pointed the gun at Jo-Jay [Simpson-Rowe]. Jo-Jay said “what the f---, and pulled out a gun. I knew what was up, so I started to scatter,” explained Mr. Woodcock.

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skari@nationalpost.com