

Leaside Property Owners' Association Incorporated

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RE: PG 13.6 Requests for Area-Specific Amendments to the City's Sign By-law - 2016 Annual Report: 1073 Millwood Road (Leaside Memorial Community Gardens)

Dear Councillor David Shiner and Committee Members

This is to express our strong support for the staff report recommendations refusing the application for 1073 Millwood Road (Leaside Memorial Community Gardens). This LPOA position is further to a Motion that the LPOA support refusing the application, which passed unanimously at the June 2nd meeting of the LPOA Board. The application is for a third party electronic sign in an OS Open Space sign district, where such signs are prohibited.

The sign would stand at a height of 11 metres (36 feet, or three storeys high!) and contain two sign faces displaying electronic "static" copy, each with sign face dimensions of 10.67 metres (35 feet) horizontally and 3.05 metres (10 feet) vertically, i.e. higher and approximately twice the size of the existing sign. The north-west facing sign face would identify the Leaside Memorial Community Gardens and include a digital section (10 feet by 10 feet) for information on programs and events that occur on the premises and in the community. The south-east facing sign face would be 100% advertisements.

Digital signs have significantly more impact compared with traditional billboards with respect to each of the impact categories:

- Driver distraction (safety concerns)
- Resident distraction (enjoyment of home/property)
- Precedent

In addition the property context of this application creates a unique benefit situation - Leaside Memorial Community Gardens (LMCG), a City of Toronto recreation centre with two ice pads plus pool and curling rink, on whose land the sign would sit – receives rental income from the current sign and would benefit financially if it were to be approved.

Driver distraction

The major issue with digital signs is the level of "distraction" for drivers, and the view impacts for residents, compared with traditional signs. At the May 12 2016 community consultation meeting,

the sign company representatives denied there was any link between digital signs and vehicle accidents. However, consider this: **digital billboards are specifically intended to attract your eyes off the road – that’s their entire purpose.** When the City was considering the digital sign by-law back in 2013, the Ipsos Reid poll commissioned by the City found that nearly three times as many Toronto drivers find digital signs distracting as compared to traditional billboards. Jerry Wachtel, a Berkeley-based traffic safety expert, concluded, based on a survey of the literature, that, “Every study in the past five years has produced consistent findings: that roadside billboards, especially digital and video, cause significant levels of driver distraction. These distractions result in poorer speed control and lane positioning, and may increase crashes in demanding situations when unexpected events occur”.

Whether or not you believe the signs directly cause crashes, the one or two seconds you spend looking at a sign is one or two fewer seconds you have to respond to someone suddenly braking ahead of you. This is the rationale behind the ban on cellphone use while driving. So why would we have the City allow a billboard to similarly distract drivers, especially at a very complicated intersection?

The short stretch between the rail overpass and the Millwood/Laird intersections demands a lot of a driver; requiring quick decisions on lane positioning in an area with poor visibility and at rush hour, a great deal of congestion. Adding the further distraction of an illuminated digital sign into the mix will not improve the safety of this already difficult stretch of road. And in addition, the sign would be an immediate distraction within the LMCG parking lot, especially for vehicles exiting at Millwood.

Further, as a result of the historical development of this area of Leaside the Laird/Millwood intersection together with the adjacent intersections and driveways do not comply with current design standards and necessitate unconventional vehicle manoeuvres that create potential safety concerns and which will be aggravated by introducing the proposed electronic sign. This site specific road design issue is articulated in detail in an attachment

The LPOA’s recent survey related to the proposed development at 939 Eglinton Ave. E. found that road safety was a major concern for Leaside residents. Should road safety considerations for a new driver distraction be taken so lightly?

Resident distraction

The sign company representatives admit they are concerned about light nuisance, and quickly advised that the law requires that the sign’s illumination be shut off at 11 p.m. And the LMCG offered that they would consider an earlier shut off for the north west facing sign face. The reality is that digital signs distract at all times of the day.

But in any case, which residents? The residents most directly affected are less than 100 metres away; the new owners of the Upper House condos at 25 Malcolm Rd. on the former Canada Post office site with units facing Millwood Road. Construction is due to start shortly on the 7 storey, 71 unit building. Residents of Krawchuk Lane and Malcolm Road were at the community consultation meeting and voiced their concerns.

Precedent

The Sign By-law, which was approved by Council only three years ago, with extensive public consultation, was specifically intended to address the need for regulation of electronic signs, does not contemplate these signs in open space and residential areas, and they are restricted to certain sign districts such as the Gardiner Gateway and Yonge Dundas Square.

This site is designated as an Open Space sign district, and digital third party signs are not permitted. However if this sign at Millwood Road and Laird were to be approved, what do we say when a sign company wants to replace the signs at Laird and Eglinton with digital? At the community consultation meeting the sign company representatives agreed there were about 15 existing old-tech signs in the Leaside area. In response to a question about whether the company would be applying to convert any of these signs to digital in the next, say 5 years, they said, "the special circumstances of the Gardens sign makes the business case unique." There is no question that the custom designed Gardens sign has been given special attention by the sign company". If this LED sign is permitted, it will create a precedent for similar signs across the City. It will not be "unique." This possibility should concern all Councillors.

Benefits to the Leaside Memorial Community Gardens

At the May 12 community meeting, the LMCG board chair spoke passionately about the need for a modern "landmark" sign for the Gardens, and the resolve of the Board to find ways to increase financial self-sufficiency for the operations of the facility. The new sign would potentially raise rental revenue to the Gardens to \$45,000 annually from \$9,000 currently. While one can appreciate and empathize with the LMCG Board in its efforts to recover costs, there are community and public interest issues that must override the narrow interests of the LMCG board in this situation.

The LPOA recommends that the Planning and Growth Management Committee uphold the Sign By-law, and recommend that City Council refuse the third party electronic sign application for 1073 Millwood Road (Leaside Memorial Community Gardens).

Respectfully submitted,

Geoff Kettel and Carol Burtin Fripp

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Co-Presidents

Attachment: Site Specific (Driver Distraction) Issues.

c.c. Councillor Jon Burnside
Ann Boroah, Chief Building Official and Executive Director, Toronto Building
Ted Van Vliet, Manager, Sign By-law Unit
Raymond White, Chair, Leaside Memorial Community Gardens

Attachment: Site Specific (Driver Distraction) Issues.

As a result of the historic development of this area of Leaside the Laird/Millwood intersection together with the adjacent intersections and driveways do not comply with current design standards and necessitate unconventional vehicle manoeuvres that create potential safety concerns which would be aggravated by introducing the proposed electronic sign.

Specific issues are:

i) All Canadian Storage/U-Haul Rental

The driveway on the eastside of Millwood is some 10-15m (2-3 car lengths) south of the stop-bar for two northbound plus left-turn lanes. Consequently, southbound left-turn traffic entering and leaving the facility must rely on "courtesy gaps". Southbound entry vehicles must wait and queue in the southbound through lane---an unexpected and potential hazard for southbound drivers exiting a signalized intersection

ii) Canvarco Road Intersection

Canvarco Road is a cul-de-sac providing access to a number of industrial/commercial businesses on the east side of Laird. Proposed redevelopment and expansion of the existing building at 33 Laird is forecast to increase traffic on Canvarco Road. The centre line of Canvarco is located some 20-30m north of the stop-bar at Millwood/Southvale signalized intersection. Existing businesses on Canvarco complain that queuing of vehicles on the southbound approach to the signal result in significant delays to their vehicles and there are no alternative routes available to them. Again southbound left-turns into Canvarco must wait in the through southbound lane for gaps in the northbound traffic. Southbound traffic exiting Canvarco need both gaps in northbound traffic as well as "courtesy gaps" in southbound traffic. This is an unusual condition that most southbound drivers on Laird would not expect to encounter on the approach to a signalized intersection.

iii) Malcolm Road Intersection

Malcolm Road is a one-way northbound road serving residential units including a condo apartment building which is currently under construction. Malcolm Rd is physically incorporated into the Laird/Millwood intersection and intersects Laird at an obtuse angle requiring almost a U-turn and a unique intersection lane configuration for a signalized intersection. Operationally, southbound traffic from Laird has difficulty signalling their intentions and cannot easily differentiate traffic turning into Malcolm from traffic bound to Southvale and/or Millwood. A similar confusion exists for northbound traffic on Millwood turning left at Laird from traffic turning into Malcolm. A concern is the conflict between traffic turning into Malcolm and southbound traffic on Laird making a 'right-turn-on-red'