



Locals win battle with builder

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The Ontario Municipal Board has ruled against a proposed luxury condominium in the Beach that raised strong opposition in the neighbourhood, and criticized the development in its decision, released Thursday.

The board agreed with architect Sharon McKenzie, who was hired by a residents association, that the proposed four-storey building at the base of Neville Park Blvd. was "monolithic in form and size" and "would impede views and dwarf its neighbours."

It said further that the development, in a neighbourhood of mostly single-detached homes, would be a "jarring addition to the immediate area and has the potential to create instability in terms of introducing a built form that others could seek to replicate if approved."

At the crux of the developer's argument, made by a planner for the architectural firm and developer Sweeny Sterling Finlayson and Co., was that the four consolidated, single-detached lots facing Lake Ontario qualified as "infill" and could be rezoned to accommodate the 10-unit condominium.

Under Toronto's official plan, neighbourhoods are protected and any new development has to respect and reinforce the existing characteristics of an area, but infill development can include low-rises or townhouses. Once built, such projects open the door to similar developments.

Neville Park Blvd., as well as Nursewood Rd. to the east and Munro Park Ave. to the west, are zoned R1, one of the most restrictive in the city, allowing only single-detached homes. A decision that the lots qualified as "infill" would have undermined the official plan and given developers a way to circumvent zoning restrictions.

"The implication that your neighbour could sell their house to somebody, who could then amalgamate a number of houses and then, before you know it, you're into this sort of fight – that's a pretty scary proposition," said Steve Ottaway, who spoke for residents at the hearing and was vice-chair of the Beaches Lakefront Neighbourhood Association.

Beach residents who formed the organization three years ago raised \$70,000 to fight the proposed development. The funds were used to hire a planner and McKenzie.

For the residents, it turned out to be money well spent.

The board agreed with the association's planner, Pino Di Mascio, that the three dead-end streets south of Queen – composed largely of two- and three-storey detached homes surrounded by mature oaks – formed a neighbourhood distinct from streets further west. It rejected the developer's proposal that the definition of the neighbourhood

should include those streets, which also have detached and semi-detached homes and walk-up apartment buildings.

"You had to stand back and actually look at the arguments instead of saying, `I just don't like a building sitting there,'" Ottaway said. "And it requires the use of lawyers who are experts, and planners who are experts, to be able to sit down and say to the OMB: This is specifically why we do not think that this fits and why it's highly inappropriate."

Ottaway wasn't the only one overjoyed with the decision.

"I'm happy ... they got it. They understand," Leontine Major said of the OMB. Major was the city planner who wrote the original staff report rejecting the proposal and who represented the city at the three-week hearing.

"It reinforces our official plan that calls for appropriate development in neighbourhoods," Major said. "It reinforces the importance of protecting neighbourhoods."