PRESENTATION teycc Oct. 14, 2021,

Toronto and East York Community Council: Mixed Income Housing

Mary Jo Leddy regarding the West Bend and 1540-1550 Bloor W.

Order of Canada, Founding Member of Romero House for Refugees

For the past 30 years I have lived in this neighbourhood, formerly called “The Stockyards”. For the animals who were slaughtered there it was a place of death and destruction. Now it is a way of life that is in danger.

Once upon a time many immigrants chose to settle here because it was affordable. Families often lived in the basement while renting out the floors above as a source of income. This was the Junction where the aspirations of many co- existed with a few mansions that were scattered throughout the area. It was mixed income housing.

Thirty years ago middle class professionals and a variety of artisans began to move into the neighbourhood. The owners no longer lived in the basements but in renovated homes.

At the same time a few houses opened in the neighbourhood – specifically committed to welcoming refugees. In the beginning there was the inevitable struggle over who would live in the backyards. However, slowly very slowly, the refugees were welcomed into the neighbourhood. The refugee children walked to school with other parents on the way; winter clothes were left on the porch for refugees who were new to the cold; people began to hire refugees that they knew. Most significantly, neighbours invited the newcomers over for supper.

After a few years the neighbourhood went through the process of finding a name (The West Bend) and began to host a fabulous street party every year. The street became the symbol of what was held in common.

Having a common good did not mean becoming buddies with each other. It meant relating in ways that were neither too close nor too far away. The street was the place which we kept clean, it was the place where we greeted each other as we put out the garbage, it was the place of the little libraries that fostered our civic culture…We did not need to hire employment counsellors for refugees -- we had good neighbours. We did not need to promote classes in Canadian culture --it was walking around every day.

There are many programs for refugee resettlement. However, the best program of all is housing refugees in a mixed income neighbourhood. There are many neighbourhoods which are closed to refugees because they are unaffordable. There are many neighbourhoods built on the assumption that mixed income neighbourhoods are somehow dangerous.

I am here this morning to tell you that living in a mixed income neighbourhood brings out the best in each other. I am here to tell you that the developments being proposed in this building will likely lead to social isolation, a loss of civic concern and numbing indifference.

Think about what is being proposed in this building, which would likely become a model for all other buildings in this area. Think about the small number of units -- TWELVE of the proposed 327 units that are classified as affordable. Think about the other buildings being proposed in the area without a single affordable housing unit.

We are not against taller buildings or increased density around a major transit hub. We welcome more people to our neighbourhood. However, we know that the history of this neighbourhood and its present reality argues for insisting that any new buildings must include the potential for mixed income housing.

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