

From: Christine Dirks

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Subject: [EXTERNAL] PEC meeting - Monday, June 17

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Having attended the public meeting in January at Central High regarding the Draft Victoria Park Secondary Plan I was surprised and disheartened at the lack of context the city representatives provided in their introduction to this important and iconic public space.

Much was said of the city's plans but little as to why changes to the area surrounding Victoria Park demand a particular and special level of attention.

What makes Victoria Park special is the quality of the environment it offers. And that is not simply the environment within the park, it is every bit as much the environment surrounding the park. The city, and its hired consultants, said little of this. They were selling a plan.

But decisions that will be made by the city about this entire place will have long-term implications for what this place looks like, how it works, how it feels and how it impacts not only the immediate surroundings but how the city markets itself. For the area surrounding Victoria Park and the Park exist as one of the best places the city has to offer.

Nothing in what the city said at that public meeting suggested this other than the idea that high rise apartment buildings and high rise condos are the way to go. Really? Victoria Park is small, a mere 18 or so acres. This is no Central Park. The shadows that would be cast on the park and its surroundings would be burdensome as would the congestion, noise and pollution from the traffic generated by these developments.

The city is poised to make decisions based on short-term economic pressures. What a shame that is. The city is the custodian of a vision for this place that goes back well more than a 125 years. The city must be the alert and cautious custodian of this place. It has no right to jump start a plan based on the political milieu of the moment.

And what of excellence in urban design? I heard nothing of such a commitment by the city. Any change to the urban fabric surrounding Victoria Park should be put through a series of rigorous public design reviews. Bring architects and urban planners from other cities to give their opinions. By bringing in such professionals the city will get honest opinions from informed professionals who have nothing to be gained and have no fear of retribution.

City politicians and city staff are temporary custodians of something that will be here for a long time. It is their responsibility to protect what came before and to take great care and caution when making changes that will affect a place that is as important, loved and iconic as is Victoria Park and its surroundings.