

Community pitches living noise walls

## GREEN BARRIER

By Greg MacDonald

Residents in neighbourhoods adjacent to the Union-Pearson rail line are countering **Metrolinx's** plans to erect sound-blocking barriers along the route with proposals to build green walls to act as separation between communities and the tracks.

Neighbourhood coalitions in the Junction and Roncesvalles communities have hired **Brown & Storey Architects** to design alternatives to cement or concrete walls. The architect's proposals include a hedged wall and other vegetation-based barriers.

The Union-Pearson link, a direct rail line running through the city from Union Station to Pearson International Airport, is slated to open in 2015 to coincide with the Pan / Parapan Am Games. The project has been unpopular in neighbourhoods along the corridor, whose residents worry about pollution, noise and other impacts on the communities.

The green options would create an appropriate barrier that fits better in the community than the traditional concrete barriers that run along GO Transit lines in the GTA.

"Rather than being a negative thing that needs to be shielded from the neighbourhood, it could be something that could be positive for the community," architect **Kim Storey** said.

Storey believes that not enough consideration [CONTINUED PAGE 3](#) >

Yonge St. vitalization proposed

## BALANCING ACT

By Brian Baker

Councillors **Kristyn Wong-Tam** and **Pam McConnell** are hoping to kill two birds with one stone by revitalizing Yonge Street's shopping districts during major utility and road resurfacing work in 2016. But first the councillors plan to meet with stakeholders to determine a long-term vision for the strip of Yonge Street running from the waterfront to Davenport Road.

"Yonge Street is now becoming a much more heavily residential street," Wong-Tam said, adding there are 26 residential development applications proposed between Eglinton Avenue and the waterfront.

"So we know that the Yonge Street of the future is going to look radically different in 10 years than the Yonge Street of today," she said. "That's really what we need to address, the 10 and 25 year vision."

Though it's only in the early stages, Wong-Tam says she wants to make the aim of the Yonge Street revitalization clear: to compete with other tourist-shopping meccas like Yorkdale Shopping Centre and Mississauga's Square One mall.

"What would be devastating to me as a councillor, who represents a big piece of the downtown, is that we don't stay on top of the assets we have and lose our competitive edge," she said.

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# GREEN BARRIER

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has been given to the aesthetic impact noise walls would have in established neighbourhoods.

“Everyone has a wonderful image of the train going through these neighbourhoods and creating an international gateway,” she said. “What they’re really going to be seeing is something quite stark.”

If the worry is about noise, the green options could perform similar noise mitigation functions as a solid wall, her partner architect **James Brown** said.

“There are strategies to fill in the hedge with solid material—rubble, recycled material—... that would be mitigating in terms of noise,” he said. “It’s something that broadens the choice into something other than pleated concrete and planks.”

Brown and Storey pitched their green proposals to community members in the Junction on Tuesday. Following the meeting, **Junction Triangle Rail Committee** member **Kevin Putnam** said the neighbourhood is desperate for an alternative solution.

“It’s a bad idea,” he said. “[Metrolinx] sprung these 16-foot noise walls on us about a year ago. It just announced it was building them; it was a surprise to everybody. Metrolinx is thinking about the noise mitigation but none of the other impacts are even on their radar.”

The barriers would have a negative impact on both the streetscape and greenspace in and around the Junction, Putnam added.

“They will have huge shadow effects, but the biggest problem is that they’ll become a huge graffiti canvas” he said. “Everything is going to get tagged and sprayed. It’s going to be a huge, ugly blight.”

Residents in the affected neighbourhoods have already waged one battle over the Union-Pearson project, fighting for electrification of the corridor. The Metrolinx board approved electrification, but it won’t be implemented until 2017. In the meantime, diesel trains will run along the line.

Putnam believes that the electrified rail will be significantly quieter than the diesel-based vehicles, and wonders what the point of installing the walls is if they are only going to be useful for two years.



Brown & Storey’s rendering of Dundas Street West along the rail corridor with a green wall separating the street from the tracks.

SOURCE: BROWN & STOREY



Brown & Storey’s rendering of Dundas Street West along the rail corridor with a 16-foot high concrete noise barrier. Metrolinx says that the rendering is not accurate and designs have not been finalized.

SOURCE: BROWN & STOREY

“These walls won’t be needed,” he said. “Let’s wait and see the impact of those electric trains.”

While community members are convinced Metrolinx will be erecting 16-foot tall, concrete walls along the corridor, the transit agency has not settled on a design, said spokesperson **Vanessa Thomas**. The agency is working with community advisory committees in all eight of the Toronto neighbourhoods along the corridor to create a design, she said.

Green design is one of the options that Metrolinx is examining.

“There are several noise wall design options on the table including the possibility of green walls for public-facing locations such as the West Toronto Railpath,” Thomas said in an email. “Brown & Storey has made assumptions in its proposal about noise walls that have not yet been designed.”

“Unfortunately, Metrolinx was not consulted by Brown & Storey with regards to its conceptual design. Without being consulted, we are not clear if Brown & Storey reflected the existing constraints with regards to rail operating requirements and property limits.”

Metrolinx plans to unveil design concepts to the advisory committees in July before undertaking wider public consultation later this year. **nr**