



Back to City, builder reach artful compromise

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Yorkville's artist culture was lost to glitzy hotels and trendy restaurants years ago. City and community officials yesterday unveiled a compromise plan that could keep the Queen-Dovercourt neighbourhood from suffering the same fate.

The plan, reached in concert with the developer of the West Side Lofts condo project, includes work space and homes for artists as well as other community benefits in exchange for slightly higher buildings. Local activists warned that more battles are ahead in the West Queen West area, but they were thrilled to mark the end of this particular battle.

Jane Farrow, of the community group Active 18, said dozens of Monday-night meetings "with tortilla chips and bottles of wine" were needed to reach the compromise between the city, local residents, artists and the developers.

The proposal previously called for six-storey and 15-storey towers on lots south of Queen on Sudbury St. and Lisgar St. The 15-storey building has been bumped up to 18 storeys, in exchange for which the developer will provide up to 52 units of affordable housing for low-income artists – space that will be sold to Toronto Artscape at a large discount.

The development company, Urbancorp., is also providing \$1.25 million for a performing arts centre in the old Carnegie Library building on Queen St. and probably \$750,000 or so for a new park, plus artists' space, said president Alan Saskin.

Farrow said the community didn't mind giving the developer more density because there will be tangible benefits.

"Artscape ... has figured out a way to keep some creative people in the (Queen West) triangle in the midst of this exponential growth," she said.

"The city worked very long and hard to retain jobs in the triangle specifically. This is crucial as Toronto becomes condo-ized and becomes a bedroom community to the suburbs."

Local city councillor Adam Giambrone said it's the first time he can recall the city managing to find a way to protect artists from development.

"This is truly groundbreaking," agreed Tim Jones, CEO of Artscape. "If we can do it here in the triangle, we can build hundreds of these units across the city."

Farrow said the Ontario Municipal Board made things worse by overturning the city's original plans for the area.

Earlier this year, however, the city won the right to appeal the OMB ruling in court, and that spurred the parties to work toward the compromise.

"We've learned that the planning process is quite broken in Toronto," Farrow said. "This is a happy moment in an overall, not-such-a-happy story. There are many things unresolved in the triangle."

City officials said they couldn't say how much the appeals and OMB process cost because the battle involved staff time and not outside costs. But a legal source with knowledge of the situation said staff costs were in the hundreds of thousands of dollars.

Saskin said construction should start in January and take about two years.