

July 22, 2024

To: Mayor Chow and Toronto City Council
From: Jill Patrick
Subject: 2024.EX16.30 – Community Safety and Well-being and Schools

Protect the well-being of children.
Support healthy neighbourhoods around schools.
Don't squander the potential of Portugal Square.
Cancel the shelter at 629 Adelaide Street West.

Please give the following your serious consideration.

Schools as Community Centres: Gil Penalosa made a brilliant presentation at last week's Executive Committee where he suggested that the City follow the example of some of the world's greatest cities: turn schools and school grounds into 24x7 community centres and close streets around certain schools to create open spaces to walk and gather for cultural events, educational opportunities, recreation and community-building activities.

Under-utilized Infrastructure: I was greatly inspired by these ideas and call on the City of Toronto to give them serious consideration. Instead of using scarce resources in an attempt to "reinvent the wheel," the more prudent approach would be to utilize the infrastructure that is already in our communities (schools, playgrounds, libraries, church halls, parking lots, etc.)

Portugal Square: In my view, the City of Toronto is squandering an opportunity to create a much-needed public space (similar to what Gil Penalosa was attempting to describe) within Portugal Square that would benefit children and their families and all the other residents of the community. Instead, the City is stubbornly pushing forward with a misguided plan to site a 24x7 low-barrier emergency shelter in Portugal Square -- without community input and despite community warnings that it is reckless and puts children at great risk. In our view, this will bring chaos and confusion to our community. The school children will be literally locked within the school building and behind tall metal fences – This is the complete opposite of what Gil Penalosa was suggesting.

Massey Village: In the early 1980s, Goldfan Holdings signed an Agreement with the Corporation of the City of Toronto to build a new townhome development along Tecumseth and Adelaide called "Massey Village." Murray Goldman, the developer, specialized in redeveloping inner city sites and retrofitting obsolete properties through urban renewal projects. The focus was to turn old industrial areas into **livable** new ones and neglected areas into **vibrant** new neighbourhoods." Many of the original owners still live here – in the townhomes that they or their parents purchased more than 40 years ago.

No Community Centre: When young families first moved in to “Massey Village” in the early 1980s, they met at the Stanley Park Clubhouse at 700 Wellington Street West – 2 substantial two-storey brick buildings (including a Playground Shelter and a Clubhouse) sited inside the Park, to the west of the current tennis courts. Unfortunately, this community gathering place and social amenity was demolished by the City and never rebuilt – leaving the rapidly expanding community around King-Tecumseth-Adelaide with nowhere to meet.

Portugal Square became the hub of our community. Portugal Square is a beautiful historic square with 2 designated buildings and 2 listed buildings which are fully restored but under-utilized. The buildings include:

- St. Mary’s Catholic Church at 130 Bathurst
- St. Mary’s Rectory, behind the Church, facing Adelaide West
- Old St. Mary’s Separate School (Santo Cristo Band HQ since 1966) at 9 Portugal Square
- St. Mary’s Church Hall at 11 Portugal Square
- St. Mary’s Catholic Elementary School and playground at 20 Portugal Square

You can see the layout of the square in this video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tSbrLpxsVkk>

Garrison Military Reserve - Cholera Graveyard: St. Mary’s Catholic Church (the 2nd oldest church in the City) sits on what was once part of the Garrison Military Reserve. When the land was granted to the Church, it came with a Cholera Pit in which the Military had deposited the remains of poor Irish immigrants who died in 1832 or 1834 either enroute to Canada or soon after arrival. The Cholera Pit was rediscovered in 2012 and a monument was erected in 2017. This sits on the south side of the Church. You can read about it here:

<https://bccatholic.ca/news/canada/torontos-forgotten-cholera-victims-honoured-with-monument>.

*Note: the other military graveyard is in Victoria Square, located at 10 Niagara St., near Portland Street (a few blocks south-east of Portugal Square). It is a designated heritage site and was incorporated into the Fort York National Historic Site in 2003. Portugal Square has received no recognition or historic designation other than for the buildings located within it. **The cholera graveyard remains unrecognized by the federal, provincial and municipal levels of government. The City needs to do something to rectify this oversight.***

Ecce Homo / Santo Cristo Festival / Band Festivals: When St. Mary’s first opened, it served poor immigrant communities: Irish, Ukrainian, Polish, then Portuguese. In 1965, the Church received an Ecce Homo statue (“an image highly revered by the Portuguese of Azorean descent”) and established a brass band to lead the procession the following year. The brass band headquarters is 9 Portugal Square. Every year since 1966, the Church has held a Santo Cristo festival where the congregation follows the Ecce Homo statue around the Square and out into the neighbouring streets. Some of the attendees walk the entire route with bare feet. The most recent event was held on May 5, 2024.

*Note: the church property has been expertly restored largely due to the continued support and generosity of the Portuguese community. **It is not right for the City to repay its debt of gratitude to the Portuguese community that helped to build this City by siting a shelter in Portugal Square that will change its nature, damage its infrastructure, and threaten the traditional and sacred use of the space.***

Community [SAFETY] Walk: On May 6, 2024 -- The day after the Santo Cristo Festival parade, Barnes Management Group held a "Community [Safety] Walk" for 629 Adelaide Street West (the proposed replacement site for the St. Felix shelter on Augusta Avenue). Unlike the parade through the neighbourhood streets that had occurred just the day before (hundreds of people, some with bare feet, walked with only one security guard following them), the City somehow felt it necessary to have 2 uniformed policemen for every 10 people. Those of us who had the nerve to turn up "uninvited" on a lovely summer day for a walk on our own streets, were told to keep our distance and not attempt to speak with anyone. This included our own Councillor who was apparently so afraid of us (and our differing opinions) that she didn't even approach us to say hello.

Note: It must be said, and acknowledged, that our Councillor has never once met with her constituents in this area to discuss our concerns. When we write, all we get back is a form email. This is ironic considering that St. Mary's Church Hall is regularly used as a Polling station and this is where I personally cast my vote for Ausma Malik when she ran for public office.

The sad truth is that Councillor Malik had our full support in this community until she abandoned us when we needed her most. She has opposed all requests that there be an open and fair dialogue so we have been forced to resort to other means such as this deputation.

SAFETY: For some reason, the City no longer likes to use the word SAFETY so the Community Safety Walk was renamed Community Walk....which contradicts the purpose and format of all previous community safety walk reports. The main community concern is SAFETY and the fact that our Councillor won't acknowledge our concerns about SAFETY. The vast majority of the recommendations in the Community [Safety] Walk report produced by BMG are expressly about SAFETY. **Erasing the word from our shared lexicon doesn't make it go away.**

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Support healthy neighbourhoods around schools.

Don't squander the potential of Portugal Square.

CANCEL THE SHELTER AT 629 ADELAIDE STREET WEST.

Sincerely,

Jill Patrick, MLS
Niagara Neighbours for Community Safety