

July 14, 2024

Toronto Council – Executive Committee
Toronto City Hall
100 Queen Street West
Toronto, ON M5H 2N2



Attention: Members of the Executive Committee:
Mayor Olivia Chow (Chair) mayor_chow@toronto.ca
Councillor Ausma Malik (Vice Chair) Councillor_Malik@toronto.ca
Councillor Paul Ainslie councillor_ainslie@toronto.ca
Councillor Alejandra Bravo Councillor_Bravo@toronto.ca
Councillor Shelley Carroll councillor_carroll@toronto.ca
Councillor Mike Colle councillor_colle8@toronto.ca
Councillor Paula Fletcher councillor_fletcher@toronto.ca
Councillor Josh Matlow councillor_matlow@toronto.ca
Councillor Jennifer McKelvie councillor_mckelvie@toronto.ca
Councillor Amber Morley Councillor_Morley@toronto.ca
Councillor Gord Perks councillor_perks@toronto.ca

RE: EX16.4 - Proposed Land Lease for the Somali Centre for Culture and Recreation (Deferred from June 18, 2024 - 2024.EX15.6)

Dear Members of the City of Toronto – Executive Council,

Friends of Silver Creek are again writing to you regarding the proposed lease and development of 3 acres of Buttonwood Park in Etobicoke Centre.

In the 4 weeks since the original deferment we have learned of the following:

From the June 18, 2024 Executive Meeting it was determined:

- EX15.6 - Proposed Land Lease for the Somali Centre for Culture and Recreation
Decision Type: ACTION
Status: Deferred
Ward: 2 - Etobicoke Centre Committee Decision

The Executive Committee:

1. Deferred consideration of the Item until the July 16, 2024 meeting of the Executive Committee to allow for further consultation and consideration regarding the Somali Centre for Culture and Recreation with the local community, Somali community and City staff.

No community consultation has taken place regarding Buttonwood Park.

What has been discovered is that there was at least one gathering on Tuesday, July 9, 2024 which was only communicated to Etobicoke Centre after the meeting had taken place without notice to all Ward 2 residents, without notification and without any members of the Somali Culture and Recreation Centre (SCCR) Committee present.

Councillor Holyday sent an email only after the meeting “...I participated in a community meeting in Buttonwood Park in which community members showed their support for maintaining the green space, and took the opportunity to speak directly to elected officials.”

Friends of Silver Creek have conducted many community meetings with community partners including the Buttonwood Hill Residents Association and various levels of government representatives over the years to ensure as many members of the community can attend and be informed, ask questions and get access to their elected representatives. But this gathering on July 9th was not a community meeting.

Instead, Councillor Stephen Holyday brought Premier Doug Ford, MPP Kinga Surma and TCDSB Trustee Marcus De Domenico to the meeting – without notification to all ward 2 residents and without an invite to the SCCR committee.

It is interesting and curious to note that Premier Doug Ford and MPP Kinga Surma who is the Minister of Infrastructure were in attendance to show up in support of stopping the lease and development of 3 acres of parkland while they ignore substantial public opposition primarily on the loss of green space and a secretive long-term lease land transfers to Therme at Ontario Place where the development will lead to the eradication of the ecosystem of the West Island removing 840+ trees and destroying about 36,000 square meters of aquatic habitat.

With many residents being omitted from any kind of information sharing FofSC reached out directly to the SCCR to learn about their committee, how they have been engaged, the process that has been taken and to understand the details of the proposed centre and their interactions with City Council.

WHAT WE KNOW

In our discussion with the SCCR members they confirmed the following:

- The SCCR signed a Non-Disclosure Agreement (NDA) once the process began to develop the plans for the Centre. They confirmed this is a standard procedure as per Create TO and the City of Toronto.

This means that members of the SCCR cannot disclose specifics or details of the project or their meetings, calls and communications with members of City Council or City Staff.

Also, as a result of the NDA documents including the feasibility study on project location or any other related documents are not for public consumption.

This NDA makes it difficult for the SCCR and the community at large to have a transparent and informed consultation on the proposed location for the SCCR Centre without reviewing data and reports from City Staff, Create TO and those involved.

- The City of Toronto put an embargo on the release of information regarding the project and location in April 2024 – but as per the SCCR, Councillor Stephen Holyday was in regular contact with members from as early as September 2023 onwards and multiple formal meetings between the two have happened since the original motion was put forth at City Council by Councillor Nunziata and seconded by former Mayor John Tory in 2022.

As per Councillor Holyday’s email dated June 12, 2024:

“However, they denied me the right to give you this information and voted down my motion to seek community consultation. A copy of the motions and vote record may be found here: <https://secure.toronto.ca/council/agenda-item.do?item=2024.EX13.4>

Given the way that the report has been brought before Council and the prior decision to keep the location secret, there is very little opportunity to gauge local community support for the proposal to lease the Buttonwood park lands for a community centre.”

As the project progressed, discussions were conducted by Councillor Holyday with the SCCR committee members and he was free to share details with all Etobicoke Centre residents – as brief as they may have been due to the NDA, from June 2022 up to April 18, 2024.

It is of interest to note Councillor Holyday proposed a motion in 2019 to build a community centre on Buttonwood Park lands similar to that of the SCCR project now. Here is the link

<https://www.toronto.ca/legdocs/mmis/2019/ey/bgrd/backgroundfile-137620.pdf>

WHAT ETOBICOKE CENTRE NEEDS

- The Somali Culture and Recreation Centre Committee are a part of Etobicoke Centre and should be supported and represented and FofSC support having this project take place in our community.
- FofSC call for the SCCR to be released from their NDA so that all documents, city council and staff communications, meetings and other relevant information be shared with the community at large so that there can be a robust and fulsome collaborative and consultative process.
- Etobicoke Centre is in need of a recreation centre and as far as residents are aware nothing has been done to move that idea forward. We now have a group of committed and engaged residents who want to see a cultural centre exist for the Somali community but who also want to see a recreation centre be available for all residents of Etobicoke Centre.
- Friends of Silver Creek are steadfast in their commitment to protecting parkland and greenspace. We do not agree with the lease and development of any parkland as per our earlier communication and in line with the City of Toronto Park Strategy.
- FofSC are committed to the transparent, accountable and inclusive process of community consultations and information sharing with all residents by City Staff and not just the engagement of those who will support a specific agenda or in the exclusion of anyone in our community.
- We call on the Executive Committee to defer the decision on this project until all residents including the SCCR are included in a public meeting with City staff present to share all details, documents and answer questions. The time period for the deferment should be more than 4 weeks (ideally three months) to have City Staff and all involved parties, properly plan for a meeting to ensure that timely communications can be shared with the community to ensure the most number of residents can attend.

This should be an occasion to celebrate an exciting new endeavor and much needed opportunity for our community but unfortunately it is not.

The SCCR members have received messages publicly and privately that are hate-filled and racist attacking the Somali Community.

FofSC call on Councillor Stephen Holyday and other members of City Council to unequivocally publicly condemn these racist attacks on the Somali community.

Councillor Holyday, City Council members and all other involved elected officials should be working to unify and not divide Etobicoke Centre while delivering a positive outcome for both the SCCR and the preservation of the park.

Parkland should never have been provided as an option for lease and development. There is great concern that Create TO and the City of Toronto are looking at previously protected greenspaces to generate revenue while density and intensification from development continues in our community. Council members may be unaware that Etobicoke Centre had abundant land belonging to the City of Toronto along the Eglinton Corridor that was sold by Build TO (the former name of Create TO) for development.

Our neighbourhoods need more parkland, greenspaces and infrastructure to support the needs, as well as the health and wellness of communities – not less.

We are still waiting to learn the rationale by City of Toronto Council to lease and develop parkland.

We welcome a fully inclusive and collaborative consultation to find a suitable location for the SCCR and a commitment from Toronto Council to ALWAYS protect parkland!

The community looks forward to your response.

Kind regards,



Tracie Napoli



Janet Griffiths-Maxymiw

Co-chairs
Friends of Silver Creek

Cc: Councillor Stephen Holyday, Ward 2 councillor_holyday@toronto.ca
Cathrine Regan exc@toronto.ca