

Pool plans 'Trump' parks budget barrier

By Duncan McAllister

A new aquatic facility and park is slated for construction as part of the Regent Park revitalization project, with a little help from "The Donald."

When Pam McConnell was told by parks and recreation back in 2000 that she was \$2.5 million short on the replacement pool for Lord Dufferin school, she spoke with Donald Trump, who was in town to build a 63-storey luxury skyscraper on Bay and Adelaide.

"I don't know anything about buying an 18 million dollar condo," she said. "All I know is I've got a bunch of kids whose parents can't afford to put food on the table and I just want to put a pool on."

Trump asked "How much, councillor?" McConnell replied, "\$2.5 million." He said, "We'll pay for it."

Despite its popularity, pre-amalgamation Toronto had decided to demolish the school, gym and swimming pool at Lord Dufferin school at 350 Parliament St. Although the school was housed in a beautiful old historic building, the 1920's structure had many problems and was considered unsafe.

The new school was completed in January of 2000, and the building was officially opened in May 2001. In



Left to right: Fung Lee, PMA Landscape Architects; Jim Melvin, PMA Landscape Architects; Pam McConnell, City Councillor Ward 28; Doug Gilet, PMA Parks Forestry and Recreation; and Jeanne Ng, MacLennan Jaunkains Miller Architects Ltd. are the team working to fill the pool.

late 2003, the schoolyard was landscaped, and a baseball diamond and soccer field were added. However, the pool remained a dream as the student body used the facilities of other schools and community centres in and around Regent Park.

It had always been McConnell's intention to give the kids their pool back.

The parks department agreed that the school board's pool should be eliminated and the city would build their own facility at the school. They had budgeted \$1 million for four lanes, with not much of a leisure area, just a basic pool for teaching swimming.

As a result of delays and the city being amalgamated, not all the same players were on board—agreements and financing that were in place had all changed, and the result was increased costs. McConnell fought to get \$3.5

million for the replacement pool but felt that the amalgamated city wasn't interested in building swimming pools, especially Downtown. By the time the project finally went to tender, the costs had risen to \$5 million. So the city came back to McConnell and said she was \$2.5 million short. She saw this as a deliberate obstacle to get out of

building the pool.

Enter Donald Trump.

McConnell was able to obtain \$2.5 million from the public benefits of the Trump tower on Bay St., however, when she went back to parks and recreation with the good news, they were skeptical about actually getting the money from Trump. Since the new skyscraper was to be much taller than any of the existing Toronto structures, the big banks took Trump to the Ontario Municipal Board

over height. Because of this procrastination on the part of parks and recreation, another 30 months slipped by, and the costs went up another \$2 million.

The tab now stood at \$7 million taxpayer dollars—and the kids had been waiting eight years.

Miraculously, the city announced the redevelopment of Regent Park with the intent of replacing some of the existing infrastructure. The planners conducted a

study on what a pool should be and came to the conclusion that, rather than just having a number of lanes, it should be an aquatic centre.

According to Doug Giles, the project manager from the parks department, "Our studies have indicated that people enjoy swimming in our larger facilities and multi-tank facilities much more than going to single tank, smaller indoor swimming pools."

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Financing for the \$11-million-dollar facility is partly Trump money, partly what had already been budgeted, and partly from money the city has committed to and approved in the capital budget.

At public concept confirmation meetings held Aug. 22 and 23 at Lord Dufferin school, residents were able to comment on the preliminary plans. The aquatic centre will now be located at the corner

of Sumach and Dundas Streets, across from what is to be the central park. The facility will have areas for children to play in, almost like a beach, lanes so kids can race and learn how to swim, pods for people who are disabled, wheelchair access, aquatic massage therapy and seniors aerobics.

The final public meeting will be held on Sept. 25, when the pool schematic design and park master plan will be presented based on

feedback from the community.

The kids may still have to wait for their pool to fill up, though.

According to the Toronto Community Housing website, "The city wants to design and build this swimming pool as quickly as possible—and start construction in 2008. The building of the new pool means that we have to make changes to the phasing plan. The central park was not scheduled to be built

until Phase Five, beginning in 2014. However, we are now proposing that the central park gets built in Phase Two, beginning in 2009."

McConnell says that the department of Parks, Forestry and Recreation are now absolutely on board and they're very excited about the project. "They presented me with this wonderful vision that in my better than what we ever intended or wished for—and we'll be the first aquatic centre in the city."