Vol. 1 Issue #12 november 2020

the bridge

Connecting people, places and ideas across our city from the downtown east

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Development Watch

Andre Bermon, Publisher

In a new series, the bridge *is profiling construction projects and developers behind the multi-billion-dollar industry that's changing the face of downtown Toronto.*

This is part two of our examination of Larco Investments Inc., a B.C. real estate giant that now owns 1 Front Street West. (For part one, see the October edition).

"Exceptional development potential" were the chosen words by BMO Capital Markets to advertise 1 Front Street West, known as Toronto's monumental Dominion Public Building.

The city's former custom house turned federal office building in the coveted Financial District was not long on the open market. The two-acre heritage property was snatched up in March 2017 by Larco Investments Inc., Canada's largest private real estate company, for $275.1 million.

It was an unusual purchase for a company coming off a major tax haven scandal – exposed in the 2016 Panama Papers – and a public relations fiasco over a proposed addition to the historic Chateau Laurier Hotel in Ottawa.

In July 2018, Larco submitted a development application proposing a dramatic reuse of the building: two high-rise structures, hotel and retail elements in a mixed-use project. City Planning initially refused the proposal, citing nonconformity with provincial and municipal planning tools and inadequate conservation methods to preserve heritage attributes.

A revised proposal, submitted by architectsAlliance on behalf of Larco in April 2020 and endorsed by the heritage consultancy firm ERA Architects, is now being recommended by Planning to City Council. The amended application retains the mixed-use two-tower concept but with certain heritage features conserved.

Why Planning was not more resolute in safeguarding the integrity of a Toronto landmark is suspect given the historic gravitas of the building. This is compounded by the additional concern as to why the federal government's commitment to "obtaining the best value for Canadians" meant selling a major civic and cultural asset to a private developer?

Larco continued on p8

Ontario Line works through Moss Park and Corktown

Donald Higney

The provincial Metrolinx agency has started laying the groundwork to add two subway stations, in Moss Park and in Corktown, for the new rapid transit Ontario Line.

The proposed line would go east from Exhibition/Ontario Place mostly underground through downtown, with stops at Queen/Spadina, Osgoode (at University), Queen (at Yonge) and Moss Park. It would bend down into Corktown and the harbour near the Don River, then northeast to the Ontario Science Centre, first underground, then on an elevated track.

Between Spadina Avenue and Moss Park, the unused subway tunnel under Queen Street built in the 1950s will be used for the tracks, along with new stations.

The Moss Park station is to be under the southern edge of the park, with the proposed entrance at the northwest corner of Queen and Sherbourne. After construction, Metrolinx plans to restore the park area. East of Sherbourne, the line is to bend south, with the Corktown station planned at Berkeley and King streets.

The Queen Street stops will give commuters choices to avoid congestion on the 501 Queen streetcar.

Subway continued on p5

Marci Ien with her two children, Blaize and Dash. **Photo: Brittany Gawley**

Marci Ien wins vote, as Toronto Centre stays red

Reedah Hayder

Liberal Marci Ien, former co-host of CTV's The Social, won Toronto Centre's federal by-election on October 26 with a lower but still substantial vote compared with the 2019 election.

The seat, held by the Liberals since 1993, was vacated when former finance minister Bill Morneau resigned in August following exposure of his involvement in the WE Charity scandal.

Ien said, "When this riding opened and it was the riding I was born in – I was born in St. James Town – I thought 'wow, do I sit at this very comfortable place, this panel [The Social] and continue to discuss things, or do I try and take a run at a position that would allow me to make some change and put action to those words?'"

As the new member of Parliament for Toronto Centre, Ien said one of her main focuses will be housing. "Housing wraps into homelessness and mental health. It's my top priority right now."

Ien said choosing the Liberal Party was "a no-brainer."

"There's so much work that needs to be done but at least there's a willingness to work. This is the government that welcomed refugees and stands up for immigrants and new Canadians."

Ien won with 10,581 votes, 42.0 percent of those voting. In second place, with 8,250 votes (32.7 percent) was Annamie Paul, who had become the leader of the Green Party on October 3. She is the first Black Canadian and first Jewish woman leader of a major federal party in Canada.

Paul thanked the riding's voters for taking a chance on the Greens. In the 2019 election, she had won just 7 percent of the vote.

"These were people who, for the most part, were doing something they've never done before, which is voting Green," she said.

This is the first time the Green Party has come second in Toronto Centre, more than quadrupling its 2019 proportion of the vote.

New Democrat Brian Chang came third with 17 percent, while Conservative Benjamin Gauri Sharma took 5.7 percent and Baljit Bawa got 1.1 per cent for the People's Party.

With less than 1% percent of the vote was Keith Komar of the Libertarian Party with 0.5% percent, along with Kevin Clarke, an independent candidate, also with 0.5% percent. This list includes Dwayne Cappelletti of Free Party Canada, who finished with 0.3% percent, and Above Znoneofthe, an unaffiliated candidate, who took 0.2% percent.

Only 31 percent (25,203) of 81,400 registered electors voted in this by-election, which traditionally has a lower turnout than general elections.

Just 7,960 people voted in advance polls in the Toronto Centre by-election, according to Elections Canada, compared with more than 13,000 in the general election last year. Mail-in ballots were requested by 362 voters, while 118 rejected their ballots.

This by-election and one in York Centre were the first to be organized by Elections Canada since the pandemic started. New health safety measures at the polls included social distancing, and offering face masks, hand sanitizer and single-use pencils, while recommending that voters bring their own pencils.

Youth connecting with seniors to combat isolation

Chatting to Wellness

If you are a senior, 50 years of age or older, and looking to talk to someone about your day or share hobbies and recipes with, sign up with Chatting to Wellness. Chatting to Wellness is a Canadian student-funded initiative focused on combating senior isolation and loneliness through companionship. We have a large group of youth volunteers that engage in genuine weekly conversations with seniors all across Canada.

Mahad Shahzad, the founder and Schulich School of Business alumni, created the organization in hopes of improving senior mental health and overall quality of life. Since 2017, Chatting to Wellness volunteers have been visiting seniors in-person in retirement homes and long-term care facilities across the province. Recently, Chatting to Wellness has migrated to a remote platform where volunteers have one-on-one conversations with seniors over the phone.

To date, Chatting to Wellness has provided more than 3,000 chatting sessions in Ontario alone. Phone chats happen every weekday night from 6pm-9pm. We have a trained team of Chatters ready to connect and have quality and meaningful conversations with you. We want to provide seniors with an outlet to share their experiences, and express their thoughts and feelings. Our team is particularly passionate about increasing senior social engagement.

If you are a senior looking to connect, please call 437-702-2025 to sign-up or online at www.chattingtowellness.ca/phonechats. Family members and friends are also welcome to sign-up seniors who they feel may benefit from this initiative. We look forward to chatting with you soon!

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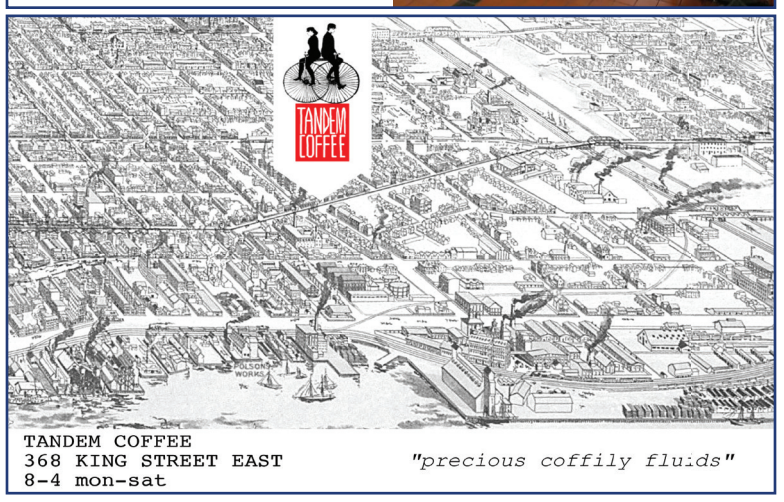

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is an independent, nonpartisan newspaper published monthly and distributed by a mix of delivery services to varying readership. 5,000 copies are circulated throughout the Downtown East - Moss Park, Corktown, Garden District, South Cabbagetown, St. Lawrence Neighbourhood, Distillery District - and to community hubs that extend across Toronto.

the bridge strives to source up-to-date activity and diverse interests from heritage, planning, and development, to culture, arts and opinions.

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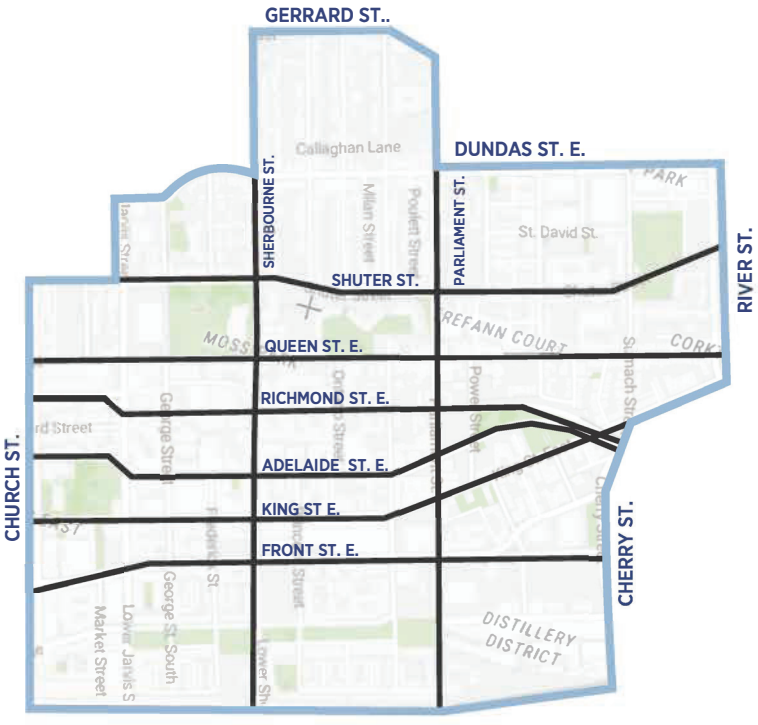

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House of Industry

Bruce Bell, Senior Columnist

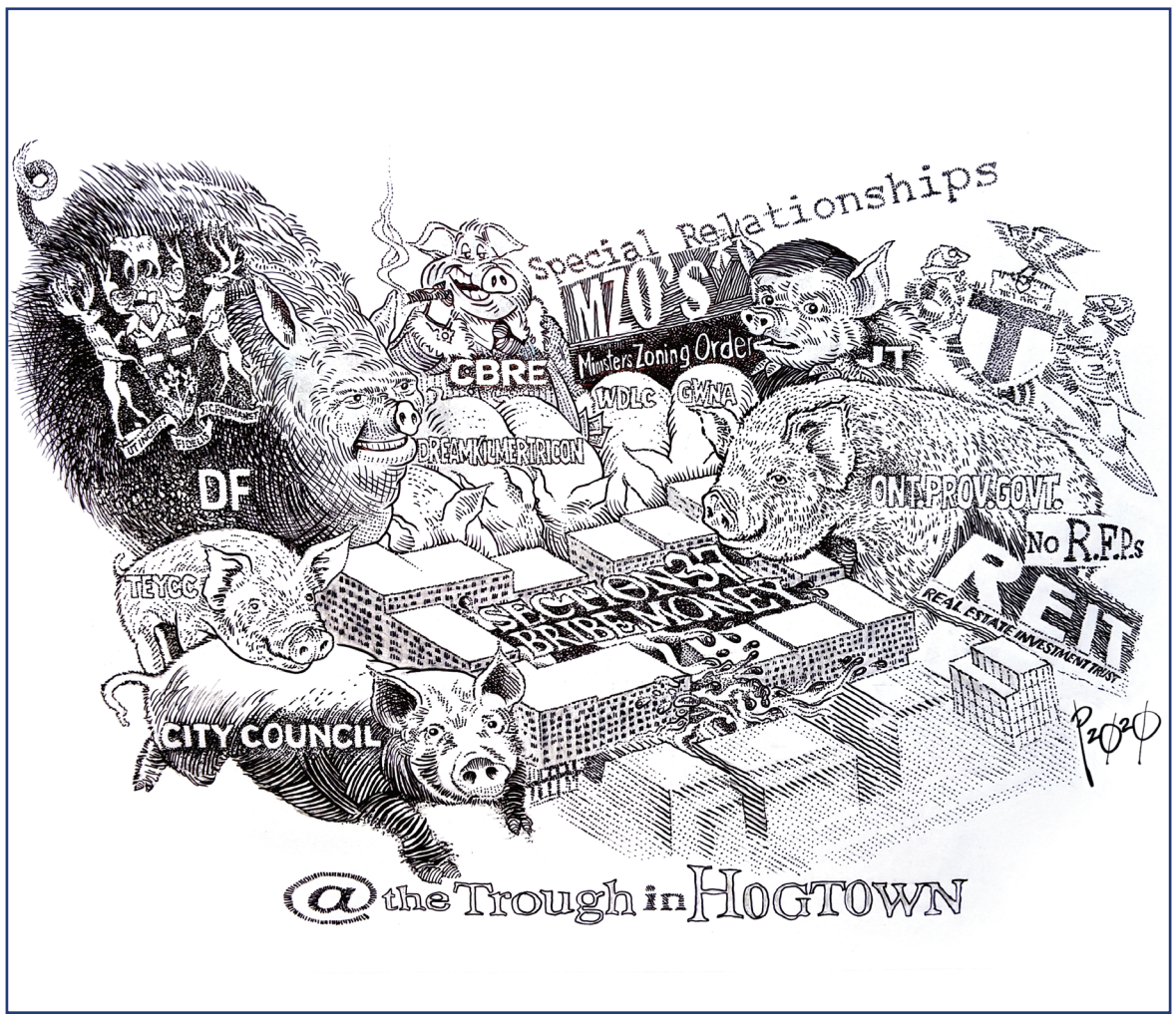
A few seasons back, I got into watching a great reality TV show called *Victorian Slum House* on PBS, which showed very realistically life in the slums of 19th-century London. Here in Toronto, we also had horrific slums, on par with those appalling conditions in Britain.

One of our worst slums was known as the Ward (St. John's Ward), in the area bounded by Queen, University, College and Yonge Streets. Long before modern government assistance, if you were poor and fell on hard times, you had to rely on family, friends and the goodwill of more fortunate people for help.

In 19th-century Britain, many underprivileged people relied on workhouses as a last resort, often described as a prison for the entire family. The workhouse, where you were put to work doing menial backbreaking jobs, was a horrifying institution that Charles Dickens brilliantly described in *Oliver Twist* and *A Christmas Carol.* But for many people, it was better than life on the streets.

Some wanted to introduce U.K.-style workhouses to Toronto, but a more progressive and humane faction of reformers instead founded the Toronto House of Industry.

In 1848, in the centre of the Ward on the southwest corner of Elm and Elizabeth streets, the House of Industry was erected, designed by architect William Thomas (also responsible for St. Lawrence Hall and St. Michael's Cathedral).



Today the historical facade is incorporated into the new YMCA. Photo: Courtesy of TPL

Progressive it might have been back then, but by today's standards, the House of Industry was appalling.

Before Toronto's first Children's Aid Society was founded in 1891, most abandoned children were left to their own devices living on the mean streets. However, the House of Industry placed some abandoned or orphaned children as indentured servants in homes and farms in and around Toronto – often making their lives worse or as bad as before.

In the 1890s, the Elm Street building was enlarged, this time under architect James Lennox, who went on to design the luxurious King Edward Hotel and the opulent Casa Loma. In 1947, the House of Industry was renamed the Laughlen Lodge and transformed into a home for the elderly.

By the 1970s, Lennox's wings were demolished and most of the original interior was gone. However, the original 1848 Elm Street facade was saved and has been designated under the Ontario Heritage Act.

The vestiges of the House of Industry building that survive are a reminder of when our city was known as Toronto the Good. Today the House of Industry's historical facade is incorporated into the new YWCA building on the site.

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Tent City Toronto, a hard place to be down and out

Ben Bull, Columnist

I went for a drink last week with my wife on Front Street. The patio was empty, which was fine by me but maybe not so great for the bar staff milling about looking for stuff to do.

It was ten minutes before the first interruption. A bloke said he was from Eritrea and asked if we could help him out. He recited a poem in Spanish, sang "Hey Jude" and left. But not before we gave him all our change.

Twenty minutes later, a young lad in a hoodie stepped into the road, peered up at the Flatiron Building, threw down his soda bottle and stomped it into the ground.

It was a Tuesday night.

We asked the server if these were typical incidents.

"It's just a normal night," she said. "You probably notice it more because of Covid."

As we paid the bill, a bedraggled-looking woman raced up to our table.

"I need two dollars!" she wailed, pulling at her hair. Her plea was intense; it sounded genuine. Maybe she really had lost her bus fare and was having a bad day? I dug around in my pockets - but then I had a flashback: an irate stranger with tears in his eyes, screaming, "You've got to help me!" Me handing him a bill, then watching him sprint round the corner and tell the exact same tale to some other mug.

"Sorry – no change," I told the woman as we walked away.

The next day, I caught the streetcar for the first time in a while. When we reached King and Yonge, a middle-aged man staggered to the front and started barking at the driver. "Where's the f*****g subway?" he yelled. "Tell me now!"

The smell of booze was intense.

The driver pointed down the road, then shouted after him, "Have another one for me, will you?"

It was 10am.

On the way home I biked along Queens Quay and peered into a desolate looking streetcar. At the back, was a lone, gaunt figure standing on a seat with his pants down by his ankles.

Armageddon has given our city a new feel and I don't like it. I've lived in this neighbourhood for 13 years. I'm used to stepping over prostrate bodies on the sidewalk and tossing the odd loony into an empty guitar case.

But today it feels different.

Six months ago, there weren't any tents in St. James Park and Corktown Common. Six months ago, I wasn't breaking off my conversation every 10 minutes to scrabble around for change.

A friend of mine is an advocate for the homeless. She told me about the "hostile architecture" at St. James Park. There's a new bandshell with no roof, and benches with armrests every few feet.

"They're designed so nobody can sleep on them," she said.

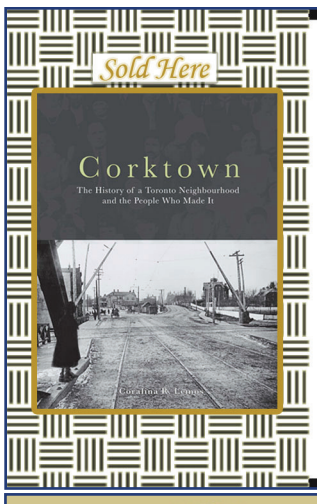
Toronto is a hard place to be down and out. The last major study of Toronto's homelessness, done in 2018, noted that up to 6,500 people rely on shelters each night and more than 500 people are sleeping rough.

They're not homeless by choice. 94% of the homeless people surveyed said, unsurprisingly, that they wanted permanent housing. More than half reported having a major health condition, such as a physical disability or a mental health complaint.

The city has taken steps to address this. The Bond Hotel at Dundas and Bond is now a temporary shelter. Longer-term measures are being proposed, including the purchase of vacant office space to be converted to affordable housing.

But why are homeless measures always an emergency? Why do we allocate entire buildings to one income group instead of mixing it all together? Why is there never enough affordable housing? Why is this problem never solved?

Covid didn't cause homelessness, but maybe it can be a catalyst to help us finally deal with it. After all, nobody wants to live in Tent City.



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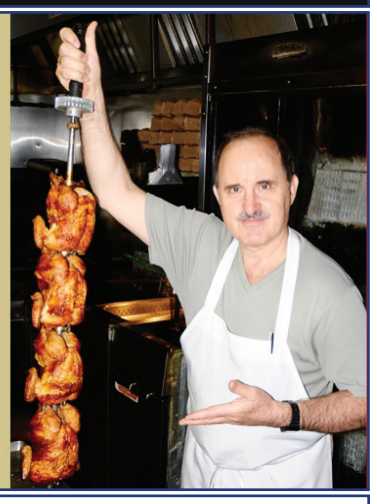
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Resiliance & Presence: winter changes at the Moss Park Market

Bayley Nargang, Building Roots

Nine months into 2020, we've had six months of living a new life. As we collectively learn a lesson about presence, resilience can be an underappreciated theme. Our resilience is founded in doing what we do best, safely, to get through the current difficult period together.

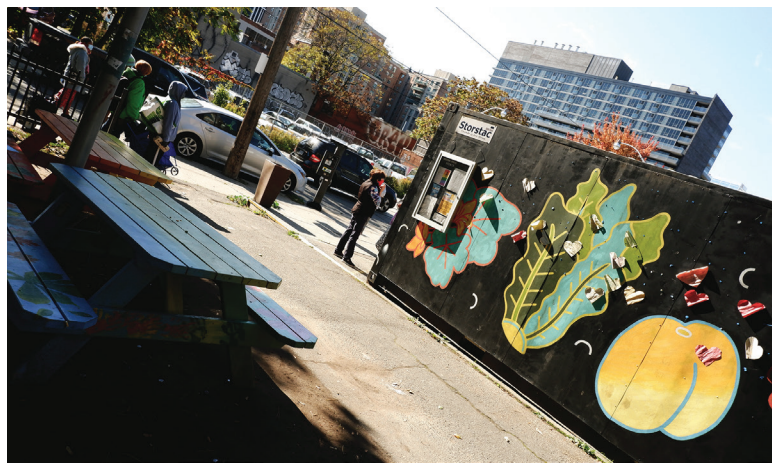
At the Moss Park Market, we're making a few adjustments to how fresh food will be picked up this winter season. We want everyone to stay warm and safe in the coming colder months.

From 11am to 4pm, we'll have five pick-up time slots of one hour each.

If you are already a regular at the market, nothing much will change; we just hope to shorten wait times. If you do not yet have a time slot, we will still serve you. We are just asking for cooperation in planning a pick-up slot once you do come!

Ultimately, our offerings are pay-what-you-can, but we suggest a donation of $5 for one bag or $25 for 4 weeks.

The Moss Park Market is fueled by community support: your presents support our presence. But we don't define people by their ability to support us financially. We want to support our community's resilience – you are welcome here.



Photos: Bayley Nargang

We are always finding ways for helping hands to stay busy. If you want to get involved with Building Roots, you can follow us on social media to find opportunities.

If you have any questions about the new pick-up process, you can talk to us in person at the Saturday market.

We'll see you soon. We'll be there.

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How Toronto's performing arts have adapted to Covid-19

Sophia de Guzman

Among the industries hit hardest by the Covid-19 lockdowns are the arts, particularly theatres and live venues. Restrictions beginning last spring on the number of people allowed in gatherings caused all theatres and live venues to effectively cancel their seasons.

"We were among the very first to close on provincial health recommendations, and it looks like we will be the very last to reopen," said Brad Lepp, director of communications and marketing for SoulPepper, an independent theatre based in the Distillery District.

Live venues and theatres initially sought to switch to outdoor concerts and online programming. During the summer, Ontario saw a dip in cases, to which the province responded by moving to Stage 3 reopening, allowing outdoor concerts.

But all businesses during these times must also deal with uncertainty. Covid-19 is rapidly evolving and restrictions from the provincial government can change quickly. Following provincial health guidelines at events like outdoor concerts takes a lot of planning and money, and risks losses should cases spike too high and new restrictions be enacted.

Theatres like SoulPepper have planned partnerships with venues like museums and art galleries to put on smaller-scale events that accommodate current provincial health guidelines.

Another way that live venues and theatres are staying alive is through virtual programs and shows, ranging from drama classes to opportunities for local playwrights to share and perform their work. The Young People's Theatre began a drama program called Inside with Imagination for children and their families stuck inside during lockdown.

Pivoting to online activities also had challenges, starting with infrastructure and technology that many arts organizations simply didn't have.

"I think that's been a tougher transition for arts organizations because we don't usually have all the up-to-date digital equipment that we would require [...] to ensure that everybody can keep up. For most organizations, it's hard to keep up to date with Windows," said Nancy Webster, executive director at the Young People's Theatre.

Several live venues and theatres qualified for aid from the government and other organizations to keep their doors open. Federal and provincial programs like the Canada Emergency Wage Subsidy and rent assistance were available to many theatres and venues. Several organizations also received art-specific aid from the Canada Council for the Arts' emergency fund and operational grants, the Toronto Arts Council and the Ontario Arts Council.

"We're looking for long-term support and a bit more sector-nuanced aid," said Lepp.

Still in the second wave – with seemingly no end in sight – arts organizations are looking to governments to get ready for the new normal.

Projected timeline for completion is set for 2027

Subway continued from p1

On October 8, Metrolinx started drilling on Queen East between Sherbourne and Seaton streets, with a similar overnight project at Adelaide and Berkeley streets having started a few days before. The drilling's purpose is to evaluate underground conditions to help determine the type of construction and will last up to four weeks.

Names of stations and locations are subject to change, Metrolinx program sponsor Malcolm McKay said at an October 18 Town Hall hosted by Spadina-Fort York MPP Chris Glover. One step to occur before building the line is an archaeological assessment to search for potential artifacts.

The Corktown site was the original location for Upper Canada's first two parliament buildings, used from 1797 to 1813 and then from 1820 to 1824. The Home District Jail operated on the site from 1840 to 1864, and a Consumer's Gas complex was built in 1887, a community fixture before it was demolished in the 1960s.

Drilling crews performing rock and soil sampling along Queen East. Photo: Andre Bermon

Long before Parliament was located there, the land of the entire Ontario Line was the territory of Indigenous nations including the Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation, Haudenousaunee, Wendat and Anishnabeg Nations. Metrolinx says it will consult with the city and other stakeholders to preserve any artifacts discovered and Indigenous communities to mitigate negative impacts on treaty rights.

With construction starting in 2023, the line won't open until at least 2027. Metrolinx estimates ridership of almost 400,000 boardings daily on trains running up to every 90 seconds, which it predicts will alleviate congestion on the TTC.

the bridge: Book Review

Glenda MacFarlane, Columnist

A Knapsack Full of Dreams: Memoirs of a Street Nurse
Cathy Crowe
Friesen Publishing, 2019
cathycrowe.ca

Cathy Crowe proudly wears the title of "Street Nurse," a name coined by one of her homeless clients when she worked at a clinic at Sherbourne and Dundas. Her memoir, *A Knapsack Full of Dreams*, demonstrates that there is no greater badge of honour.

Crowe grew up in the post-war boom, the daughter of a salesman and an ER nurse. Like her mother, she studied nursing at Toronto General Hospital, and, after graduating in 1972, worked at a Bay Street practice, where she was "hired help for the doctors" rather than a participant in patient care. Fortunately, Crowe soon found her way to a very different type of nursing at the South Riverdale Community Health Centre, where healthcare, social justice, and advocacy met. As Crowe explains, it was "…where I truly learned that health is political, the personal is political, and that politics are the most important determinant of health." One of Cathy Crowe's objectives has been to bring awareness of larger societal issues into the forefront of the nursing profession. "I am heartened," she says, "that environmental justice, indigenous rights, climate change, peace, good jobs, and fighting poverty are now seen as nursing and health issues." But it is the campaign for a national housing program that Crowe calls "the fight of her life." Her book details the deplorable and desperate conditions of homeless populations, as well as the policies that have led to a crisis of homelessness in Toronto and other Canadian municipalities.

The facts of Crowe's life are fascinating, and she weaves them together in a compelling manner, using a brief description of a favourite movie, for example, as preface to each chapter. It is, however, the emotional impact of this book that gives it its power. We feel the urgency of the issue as Crowe describes the suffering of her clients who live under the Gardiner Expressway, minutes away from luxury condos, or who are forced into "…crowded overnight shelters, sparse daytime drop-in centres that often sheltered over 400 people with only two toilets, church basement shelters run by volunteers with only mats for people to sleep on." These are lives plagued by poverty, violence, bedbugs, illness, starvation, extreme heat, and extreme cold. Especially heartbreaking are the accounts of homeless children. At one point in the book, Crowe tells the story of how she started to cry when she was asked to display the contents of her nurse's kit -- which included items necessary to survival like socks, granola bars, and bus tokens. Unless you are made of stone, you will weep while reading about the lives of the homeless in our city.

Yet Crowe still dreams. She has seen clients turn their lives around against all odds after receiving housing, and she continues to advocate for strategies such as "The 1% Solution," where each level of government would contribute 1% of its budget to affordable social housing. If you believe that housing is a human right, this book is a call to action.

Let's answer it.

Corktown's changing landscape

Coralina Lemos, Corktown Historian and Author
corktownhistory.com

Imagine a city with no buildings older than 100 years, where any edifice built before this time would be torn down.

In 1963, a CJBC (CBC) radio discussion considered whether to preserve or demolish Old City Hall. Controller William Dennison opposed destroying the building because its visual presence was an integral part of the city's past. Architect Harry Cole did not agree. "Rubbish! Saving Old City Hall would be like saving a baby's diaper. The city's too young to have a past worth preserving. Let's have a competition to design a new building to take the place of the city hall." Adding to the discourse, a member of the League of Women Voters offered a compromise, "Let's keep the clock tower because it closes the vista up Bay Street, but let's demolish the rest of the building."

This snippet of discussion is enough to indicate that in decisions whether to designate, list or demolish an old building, one will certainly hear a variety of opinions. It took another ten years for Toronto's Old City Hall to be designated under Part IV of the Ontario Heritage Act, ending thoughts and discussions regarding its demise.

Having the opportunity to see heritage buildings and hear stories behind them pleases residents and visitors to our city. Unfortunately, many local structures go up in smoke before they are even heritage listed. For instance, the Davies Terraces are now completely destroyed following two fires, one in April 2018 and another in June of this year. Consequently, the story associated with Robert Davies Terrace on the south side of Queen Street East and the Dominion Brewery, on the north side, is forever fractured as the Davies Terrace were never listed as heritages.

But had these properties been designated, they might have qualified for heritage grants that facilitate the maintenance of historic structures thereby enhancing local streetscapes. Two recent surveys by the Corktown Residents and Business Association found that most who live in or near Corktown regard its heritage as an integral part of the community.

Thus, if we value the physical characteristics and stories associated with our communities, property custodians and local stakeholders should take steps to preserve these important components of our local and national heritage. Information regarding the Inventory of Heritage Properties is readily available on the City of Toronto's Heritage Register webpage, along with an interactive map that helps to clarify whether a property is listed or designated. If this topic is of further interest to you feel free to contact me at: corktownhistory.com

High development at George and Adelaide draws residents' ire

Jayne Kitchen

On October 20, the City of Toronto held a consultation meeting on plans for a 39-floor, mixed-use condominium at the corner of George and Richmond Streets. The site is occupied by three buildings, two of which have been assessed as candidates by ERA Architects, a consultancy firm, for designation under Part IV of the Ontario Heritage Act - a law that would protect exterior features of the buildings in the proposed development. The rest of the lot is parking space.

The massive building is to house 520 residential units, 122 parking spaces and 476 long-term bicycle spaces. As a result of the existing buildings' industrial antiquity, the plan is to incorporate a chunk of the 125 George Street building and the entire building at 109 George into the façade of lower-level retail spaces. The intention is to retain the character of the original architecture in its street-facing elements. The current parking lot is planned to be an outdoor community space with seating along the western side of the new building.

Some units are to be reserved for affordable housing in partnership with WoodGreen Community Services' Homeward Bound program. Ultimately, the developers defended the tall building model as practical housing in preparation for the inevitable growth of the King-Parliament area, while convenient to near current and future transit.

Artist rendition of George and Adelaide development. Image via submission to the City of Toronto.

The presenters faced many tough questions from the audience. The main point of contention was the proposed height of the building. Thirty-nine storeys is unprecedented for the Old Town neighborhood; the Axiom towers on Adelaide reach 21 and 19 storeys respectively.

With people working from home and fleeing the downtown core during the Covid-19 pandemic, one participant said, it seems unusual to construct such high density. Others shared concerns over construction noise, particularly affecting people doing business from home. More in-depth information on the Homeward Bound partnership was requested, including how many affordable units would be provided. Several attendees raised parking issues, as well as the effects of higher population on a street already busy with traffic.

The City recorded the responses of everyone who shared their concerns. Planners will now consider adjustments to the proposal, but it didn't seem that easy changes would win over residents of the surrounding area.

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No fixed address: life in the shelter system

Article provided courtesy of the Toronto Writers Collective

WE ARE NOT what you think. We are NOT THE PROBLEM.

NOT ALL drug addicts or alcoholics, but some are driven to numb their pain.

NOT ALL in a different reality; most are painfully aware of their world.

NOT ALL layabouts. Some work; pursue creative talents or take upgrading courses. Many volunteer their expertise. Some are veterans or retirees.

NOT ALL uneducated or illiterate. Some have multiple degrees or diplomas, and others love reading, travelling somewhere – anywhere but where they are.

NOT ALL criminals. Contraband is not illicit drugs, paraphernalia or alcohol: those things can be used openly under harm reduction. But beyond-dining-hall consumption or possession of food, snacks and bottled water results in warnings or discharge. Such meal supplements and medication essentials are forced underground; many sneak verboten bites and sips in washroom stalls, hidden corners or under the covers. These indictable offences are worse than interminable screamed rants or real aggression using words, fists or knives. Our belongings are hostages. Discharge or transfer is threatened if over the City's ridiculous two-bag limit regardless of need, medical or otherwise. Downsizing is more important than empowering residents for housing, jobs, aspiring careers. We are ALL criminalized.

NAMELESS INDIVIDUALS, we do NOT fit prescribed boxes.

SYSTEM DISABLED, limited by ridiculous policies and attitudes from those with no real desire to downsize the biggest business in town.

WE SHOULD BE GRATEFUL for room and board despite the hefty price. No privacy. Food insecurities. Dehumanized. Harassment. Scared to fight for what's right. We ALL have life-long residual anxiety and lived trauma.

Bland, over salted, food past-expiry date or inedible is dished out on a year-round monotonous 3- to 4-week cycle with little change in between. We are ALL hungry.

We are NOT cattle to be herded by loudspeaker to meals; to the office for tongue-lashings from staff; and to the front desk for mail or prescription pick-ups. We are adults, but treated as if children in need of guidance such as curfews.

We ARE HUMAN BEINGS trying to survive. ALL SURVIVORS, we should be respected.

NOT ALL successful as human beings. However, many are far more 'human' than the workers who dehumanize us, often with holier-than-thou glee.

We have NO RIGHTS.

Despite aspiring shelter mission statements, reality is sadly different. Not refuges, shelters do not generally heal, accept, or provide hope and real opportunities for securing services, housing or skills for a life beyond. We are NOT unconditionally accepted anywhere except by the odd worker.

We ARE accumulating more bodies each day. Bizarre COVID-19 economics, restrictions and fears and immigration exacerbate the problem.

Housing is a basic human right. As a lower life form with NO FIXED ADDRESS, we cannot access it, NOT eligible.

Shelters and staff need an overhaul. Not client-oriented, power-hungry staff jeopardize residents' well-being. THEM NOT US.

SYSTEM DISABLED, limited by policies and attitudes. No public or political will to eradicate homelessness. Those truly disabled are routinely discriminated against. Facilities and everyday activities made difficult, inaccessible or unavailable for some indeterminate reason. Doctors' letters for accommodations ignored, the disabled repeatedly told not to expect special treatment or any help as they must be 100% independent to stay. Staff are the most disabled of all.

ALL scarred for life with no place to call their own.

ALL frayed, not in Sunday best, but more authentic than the rest. Few consider society's dregs, the unnamed who just want a safe place of their own. Do you?

Fewer dollars could solve this problem. Innovative programs will work. The homeless have goals, aspirations and want off the streets. The homeless are not the real problem.

Toronto will never be a world-class city until it deals with homelessness. House us, save money and elevate Toronto's reputation internationally.

Sometime, someday, somebody will rent us someplace somewhere to call home. Hoping you have an accessible, transit-friendly investment condo to rent me a home of my own.

Please contact Heather at home4heathernow@gmail.com

Heather is an aspiring disabled writer who is looking for housing. She uses her current difficult circumstances for fodder for stories and essays, and dreams of a time when everyone will have a safe place to call their own.

Time for tea - Time for art: Amazing Moss Park

Carol Mark

Traditionally, tea has been used as a way of taking a break and at the same time deliberating about something important. This has been a tradition dating back to the Empire Loyalists and Canada's base of immigrants from Great Britain, Ireland and Scotland. We can look at Toronto history and find out that the tea was delivered to a Lipton's Tea Warehouse on Front Street. It was then sold to shops that carried large tea tins. I buy tea memorabilia and I own a few red Ocean Blend Toronto tea tins from the 1890s.. They are stamped with a local store address or just the original Lipton's tin box. You can find them at the St Lawrence Antique Market or other similar venues.

With the pandemic and self-isolation, most people are experiencing increased stress levels. There has also been a marked resurgence of tea, maybe due to these stressful times, when it is required to take a pause, breathe and drink a cuppa. The British certainly took time and during the war, it was "Stay Calm, and Carry On" with its tea carts and the tea ladies.

Maybe during Covid, we all need to find that calm place internally. Tea allows us to hit the PAUSE button. It becomes a tool for de-stressing. Recently in the news, the Danish ambassador was promoting "hygge",

Image by Sally Kou

embracing the ideas of coziness and comfort. A concept that one cozies up in times of stress, has a hot beverage and snuggles by yourself or with others. It appears globally, people are turning to ways to cocoon safely.

Torontonians need to start looking at how to create or take on traditions that provide resilience and self-care. It goes a long way for coping with stress. Allowing, oneself to take time to check in with oneself. How are we feeling today? Is there a nagging feeling of uncertainty? How can we calm down? Take a moment in the day to put on the kettle and make a cuppa. Be alone with your thoughts, give gratitude and remember to breathe deeply filling your body with oxygen.

Make your tea break a daily routine.

As part of our Amazing Moss Park Artists Collective, Sally Kou is a self-taught artist who creates mixed media illustrations. She has a natural talent for writing and enjoys using it as a form of expression. She's created concept art for different fashion brands, and illustrative posters for local businesses. Her work is eccentric, colourful, and whimsical, usually specializing in animals, female illustrations, and nature. Sally has created a tea series to inspire those moments of calm and to say, 'enjoy and remember to celebrate the moment.'

Check her out on Instagram @sallykou www.sallykou.com

Stay tuned for our spring art fair, www.amazingmosspark.ca

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City Planning was unable, or unwilling to challenge Larco on the two-tower development

Larco continued from p1

According to public documents, the government's asset management department had declared 1 Front Street West surplus in early 2015. The Dominion Public Building was eventually transferred to the Canada Lands Company Limited, a crown corporation used to sell federal real estate.

City Council became aware of the pending disposal when federal authorities approached City Planning about the building's heritage potential. Because it was federally owned, 1 Front Street West was not subject to local heritage controls, including the Union Station Heritage Conservation District, a planning tool to guide development and protect historic buildings in the Financial District.

Regarded as both an exceptional example of Beaux-Arts classicism and a rare early 20th-century public works project, Council decided that upon transfer of the 93-year old building, a notice of intention to designate the DPB under Part IV of the Ontario Heritage Act would be served on the new owner.

Nowhere in the public exchange between City Planning and the federal authorities did Council display any interest in the building's future, including the right of first offer to purchase the building.

On January 3, 2017, the property was transferred to the Canada Lands Co., which hired BMO Capital Markets to broker a sale. No bidding process or asking price was specified. Two months later, the property was sold to Larco Investments Inc.

Larco's purchase of 1 Front Street West should have raised alarm within the heritage community, given the company's controversial addition to the Chateau Laurier Hotel. But decades of being a semi-closed-off federal office building seems to have removed the Dominion Public Building from public consciousness. The grandiose monument, once open to citizens and lauded for its marble-clad, Corinthian-columned commerce room, known as the Long Room, had diminished in cultural memory.

Artist rendition of the two-tower 1 Front Street West development. Images via submission to the City of Toronto.

Unlike more celebrated Toronto landmarks like St. Lawrence Market, Casa Loma and Old City Hall, 1 Front Street West got scant media attention when the property was sold. Even local neighbourhood associations, traditionally vocal about infringement on heritage, remained silent.

Once the site was under private ownership, the city was able to apply two heritage designations to it: one as an individual property and the other through the Union Station Heritage Conservation District. Both designations, passed by City Council on May 10, 2017, offered protections from interior and external alterations.

But the heritage laws passed to govern development in the city's culturally sensitive Financial District turned out to be written by the very architectural firms behind the design of the DPB development.

The Union Station District Plan, adopted by City Council in 2006, laid out the guiding principles that were incorporated into the Union Station Heritage Conservation District the same year. Among several private architectural groups that prepared the District Plan were the two leading firms for the Larco project: architectsAlliance and ERA Architects.

ERA Architects unabashedly endorsed Larco's first failed bid to the City for the project, claiming the proposed modifications – the near complete alteration of the structure's praised architectural façade along with mounting two high-rise towers – would "enhance the building's heritage character."

City Planning successfully rejected some of the more egregious alterations, but in the revised application was unable, or unwilling, to challenge Larco on the two-tower concept. Instead, using one of the few tools available to leverage the hubris of over-ambitious developers, planners suggested a hefty community benefits fee, known commonly as Section 37 money.

If Council approves the two 45- and 49-storey high-rises, complete with office, hotel, retail and residential units, the city would be paid $4.6M for capital repairs of Toronto Community Housing buildings and to provide "affordable housing."

For a company owned by the billionaire Lalji family, the proposed cash offering pales in comparison to the hundreds of millions of dollars revealed to have been routed to offshore holdings by Larco and its subsidiaries – taxable money that could have gone a long way to helping Canada's underhoused.

Larco's ties to the federal government are well documented. Why the landmark Dominion Public Building was sold to the private company in such haste invites speculation. The three brothers who rule over Larco's real estate empire had likely been lobbying for 1 Front Street West for some time, waiting for a pliable government.

The loss to the city's cherished history is incalculable. To quote an anonymous comment about the proposed development,

"What a godawful pair of penetrating shards into this beautiful, historic building. It's like the building has been stabbed to death by a pair of daggers."

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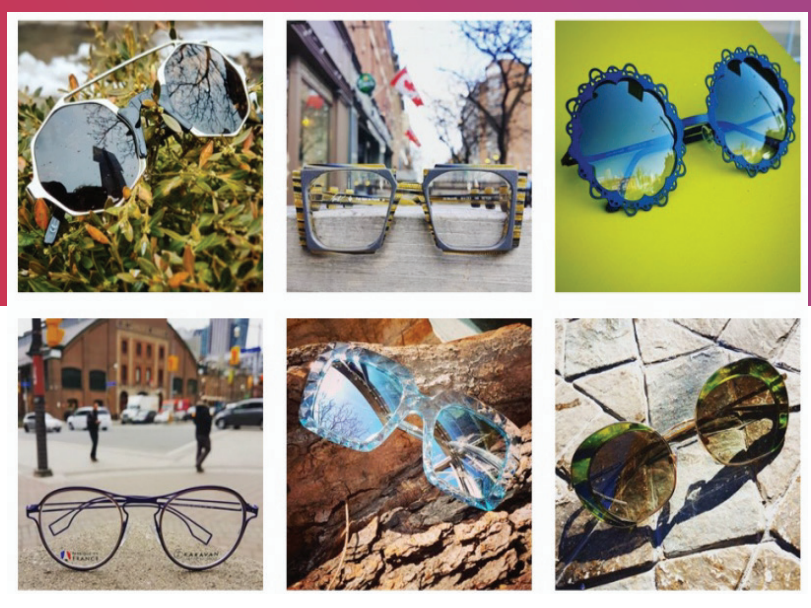

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