

The knives are being sharpened for Kensington Market

Toronto is a city that's still got its balls. The city hasn't been completely sterilized in the name of urban renewal or whatever, and there are areas of the city that have a vibrancy, a funkiness.

But ominous clouds are in the sky: the city is at the moment threatened by city planners' schemes that, if implemented, will reduce the place to a north-of-the-border version of Los Angeles or Chicago.

One of the proposed victims is the tiny Kensington Market area, a jumbled enclave of houses and sidewalk shops that is home to about 6,000 people and a shopping area for thousands more.

To destroy Kensington Market would be to eliminate a vital part of the city. And if the area goes then there is no hope for other like areas of the city and a grim sea of concrete and glass will reign over Toronto.

It's known as progress. Among the large North American cities Toronto stands out as a rare and precious jewel. It isn't that this city is very beautiful or cosmopolitan but it is a city that hasn't been ruined as nearly all of the other large cities have been in the past 10 years or so.

Ugly expressways don't as yet gash through the heart of Toronto with their accompanying noise, traffic and pollution; and bleak urban renewal projects haven't yet replaced the old neighbourhoods surrounding the city centre.

Virtually every large U.S. city is uninhabitable, except, perhaps, for San Francisco, where a vigilant group of citizens has been successful in keeping the planners at bay. You have only to visit New York to be thankful for living in Toronto. The noise, crowds and foul air in New York are overwhelming. Expressways tear all over the city and older neighbourhoods are periodically ripped apart and replaced with public housing projects that put poor people into hideous concrete boxes in the name of humanism.

Los Angeles is even more frightening. There the car is supreme. LA is a vast, flat, as-far-as-the-eye-can-see place that is connected by hundreds of miles of freeways. More freeways are continually being built but they're obsolete by the time they are completed. One freeway perpetuates another, and that another, in an endless cycle. There is no actual centre to LA; its so-called downtown is mainly parking lots. With the automobile dominating the scene, the smog has become so thick that doctors warn thousands to leave every year or face serious illness. Public transport is practically nil, and this metropolitan area of nearly 10 million has not one subway line or other form of efficient rapid transit. Los Angeles is truly the prototype of the 20th Century nightmare city.

Toronto, thankfully, has not yet fallen victim to the grim conditions which prevail in most U.S. metropolises. It still has the older neighbourhoods where ethnic groups can live and form their communities; it has a vital and booming central district which remains the heart of the city. Expressways don't yet charge

through Toronto's neighborhoods but circle the city in a fairly intelligent pattern. Although the city is painfully slow in subway expansion it has given the OK for the extension of the Yonge Street line up to Finch Avenue which will bring more areas of suburbia into its realm.

It is quite a complement to Toronto that the renowned U.S. city planning critic Jane Jacobs, author of *Life and Death of the Great American Cities*, has chosen to live here. Mrs. Jacobs has said that she finds it one of the few decent cities left and has joined the campaign to halt the mutilation of Toronto.

Unfortunate progress

Unfortunately, there are signs that this city is making rapid progress towards becoming another gruesome U.S. type place. A foolish municipal government is on the brink of instigating a number of projects that will bring upon Toronto most of the ills that plague the large U.S. cities. Expressways under construction and on the planning board will cut through the heart of the city.

The Spadina Expressway is roaring down from the North, into the city centre, destroying in its path a beautiful ravine and a number of neighbourhoods including the historic Annex.

On the planning boards is a monstrosity called the Crosstown Expressway that will slice the city in half north of Bloor Street and meet up with the Spadina Expressway.

The new expressways will bring thousands of additional cars daily into the over-congested streets of central Toronto. With them will come more noise and exhaust fumes.

Expressways will soon be anachronistic, many experts have predicted, because the city can no longer accommodate the volume of cars being pumped into it. The car must be replaced by some more efficient mode of transport. An expanded subway system would be more beneficial to the city than the expressways.

But there is hope left for Toronto. The Spadina Expressway hasn't been constructed south of Lawrence Avenue yet and Kensington Market and Don Vale are still standing. The decision must be whether this will remain a city that is fit for people to live, a city that will respond to intelligent and humane planning; or whether the city hall bureaucrats and planners with their IBM mentalities will be allowed to take over and murder the place. Once the manage has been done there is no turning back.

Kensington Market is one of the areas of the city whose future is hanging in limbo. If the city decides to go ahead with its project then this politically insignificant area will vanish. It's a small section and the residents are mainly recent immigrants, mostly in the lower income brackets, and their voices so far have been ignored at city hall.

Kensington area unique

Kensington Market is one of the more unique areas in Toronto. It's an old style market-neighborhood in the European tradition, with small crowded shops, open air stores, and sidewalks and streets that are constantly



Excalibur - Dave Cooper

teeming with people. The area is one of the last of its kind on this continent.

San Francisco once had a similar market area but their city planners deemed it 'unsanitary and inefficient' and it was levelled to make way for a posh high-rise apartment project for the city's well-to-do. But in Toronto, Kensington Market visibly flourishes.

In the history of Toronto Kensington Market has played a central role. About 100 years the empty tract of land where Kensington now stands was subdivided and houses were built for the working class British immigrants that flooded into the city in the latter part of the 19th Century. Around the turn of the century, the British families started moving away to more prosperous areas and the incoming Jews settled in the area. With them came the kosher butchers, the synagogues, and the bakeries specializing in bagels. For years the area was known as the Jewish Market. The Jews developed roots in Toronto, became wealthy and moved north, leaving the area to successive influxes of Italians, Greeks and now the West Indians and Portuguese. Many well-off Torontonians, living in suburban splendor, grew up in the Kensington area and fondly recall the old neighborhood.

Kensington Market is a tight little neighborhood. It consists of about four or five short narrow streets, jammed together south of College Street, just west of Spadina. It's a low-lying area, with the small shops and houses leaning upon one another. It is an old neighborhood, but not a slum. The houses aren't dilapidated but are well cared for, with fresh coats of paint and small well-kept gardens. The area seems jumbled but that's one of its charms. Everything sort of meshes together to make up a single community.

In the shops of Kensington Market are the freshest and cheapest foods in town. It's also a good place for the more obscure delicacies that aren't available in your local supermarket.

West Indian shops sell all the spices and fruits needed for exotic Caribbean dishes. There isn't any other place in Toronto where you can get freshly-cut stalks of sugar cane to suck on. There are still kosher butcher shops with cages of live chickens cackling away.

On the blocks of Kensington Market one can get fresh octopus, pickles from huge floating vats, vivid red peppers and any kind of nut or grain you could possibly desire. There are also clothing stores, junk shops, appliance stores and most everything else.

Market eyed greedily

But Kensington appears to be doomed. The city has been looking at the area for some time and smacking its greedy lips.

The district is ripe for urban renewal - according to city planners. From all sides the district is being eyed. The Spadina Expressway looms to the north and if it goes through will rip through Kensington. The Toronto School Board wants to build a school in the area and would need to expropriate a good deal of property. The notoriously grabby University of Toronto would like Kensington Market for expansion, as would Western Hospital which lies to the west. The George Brown Technical College would like part of the area. And developers see it as a good place for an apartment development.

The city fathers, from their homes in Rosedale and Forest Hill, look upon the Market as an unsightly, rambling slum that they would like to see dealt with in some way. For the residents and shopkeepers the future does indeed look bleak, with the bulldozers just around the corner.

On any week day Kensington Market is teeming with a motley stream of shoppers. It attracts people from all over the city. The Market serves the newly-arrived immigrant families in the area, shoppers from the suburbs who come down to partake of the bargains, and hip kids from the so-called Spadina Village (the Market already has its first boutiqueish shop called Things Handicraft). Together they give the area a pace and life that is altogether missing in the muzak-ridden suburban shopping centres.

In front of Joe's Fruit Market, with its vast open-air array of fruits and vegetables stacked into neat piles, Art Mazzone is putting apples in a stack. He explains his feelings about the area:

"I've been working here for about 12 years now. It's a good place to work; everybody knows everybody. I mean I know the people across the street and all over. It's nice and friendly that way."

What if the Market should disappear?

"That'll be a sad day for us. I don't know where most of the stores would go. I guess we could find another location somewhere. If they tear this place down they'll put a lot of people out to work. You build up a business if you stay in one place long enough. You get to know the customers. I don't know about the people living in the houses. Isn't the Residents' Association gonna do something?"

Residents' group left out

But the Kensington Area Residents Association (KARA) haven't had much of a say in deciding the future of their neighborhood. A typical example is the story of the proposed new school in the northern part of the area.

A number of years ago a Mr. Edward Silverberg purchased from a dairy 1.2 acres of cleared land next to the College Street fire station. He in turn sold it to the University of Toronto. While the university owned the property, the residents group from the Kensington area came up with a number of suggestions for utilization of the land which would benefit the community.

Some wanted the land for a residence for doctors and nurses from Western Hospital with some type of shared community facilities; others thought it should be used for a pre-school center for Portuguese children. One proposal was that the land be used for housing units to temporarily house Portuguese immigrant families. It was even suggested that a neighborhood city hall be built on the site.

But suddenly last spring it was announced that the university had sold the land to the Toronto board of education. The residents of the area were never once consulted. The school board later made it known that the land would be insufficient for the new school and that it would have to expropriate property to the south. So much for the concept of involving people in the planning of their neighborhood.

Kensington Market is no spotless, gleaming supermarket. The sidewalks and streets are dirty with animal blood and vegetable parts. But it certainly is no health hazard. One of the joys and prime motives for shopping there is you always know what you're getting is fresh. The fruits, vegetables, and meats aren't wrapped in cellophane or hidden in deep freezers but are out in the open.

I spoke to an elderly Portuguese woman, dressed in black and lugging a bag full of tomatoes; she explained in broken English that she lived a few blocks away on Denison Avenue. "The best place I buy at stores I buy here. So nice tomatoes I buy here. I buy here all the days." She displayed a bursting tomato. "I like buy here because some speak Portuguese. It's good."

The Portuguese immigrants in Toronto, the most recent large group to settle here, have made the Spadina-Kensington area their community. Here are their children, shops, homes, and community organizations. Huge housing projects, with their deadening sterility are not

By
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the places for these people. The frightful conditions in the city's Cabbagetown projects should serve as adequate warning.

Emily Robson, a housewife from York Mills was in the richly-scented Imperial Bakery getting bread and pastries for the weekend.

"I really enjoy shopping here," she explained. "I don't come that often, only when I have the spare time. I wish I could shop here each week. I always look forward to it."

Did she consider the Market unsanitary? "Oh no, not really. It isn't exactly spic and span of course. I've never gotten anything here that I didn't think was clean enough to feed my family. The shops are all clean inside. If they were dirty I wouldn't come."

"I think it would be an awful shame for them to get rid of this market. I mean these people live here and earn their livings and you can't just throw them out. Last summer we had friends from Florida come up and they just loved it when we brought them by here. Why doesn't the city clean out the lake so we can swim in it again?"

There are a number of West Indian shops in Kensington Market to serve the 10,000 West Indians who have come to the city in the last few years. In the West Indies Fruit Market I met Gordon King, a tall black man from Barbados shopping with his wife.

"We live up on Harbord," he explained. "Come here to shop every week. We like it because there are West Indian shops right here and all the others. People from the West Indies like to buy in their own shops. The prices are the lowest here."



A bearded guy with a bright pastel cape on wouldn't tell me his name but said he was a University of Toronto student who lived in a flat off College Street and shopped regularly in Kensington Market.

"The city is obviously against poor people," he said, "I mean they just prey on the poor neighborhoods. It pisses me off that they want to tear down these parts of the city that have soul. Why can't they just leave everybody alone." That's a question that goes unanswered.

Not all the city hall politicians are completely oblivious to the plight of Kensington Market.

Margaret Campbell, who has been in city politicians that is trusted and respected in the neighbourhoods like Kensington has been vocal in the fight to preserve Kensington and the adjoining Spadina area.

Kensington," Mrs. Campbell said last spring, "and it not exclusively Kensington but the whole Spadina area too. It is, for instance, the second most important needle trade in the world. That's something to preserve."

"People are worried about the whole threat of the Spadina Expressway. People are asking, 'What is the plan for south of Bloor?'"

Sadly, Mrs. Campbell is a lone voice. The knives are being sharpened.

