

Why is the OMB desecrating Toronto's neighbourhoods?

In Long Branch we have about 100 approved 3 storey detached houses on 25 feet split lots with roughly double the allowed density. Mostly these have been approved by the OMB against local opposition, in the last 5 years. Using 2011 Long Branch census stats (about 0.04 of the population) and the outstanding OMB hearings (8%) indicates the extreme situation.

The OMB has imposed "North Brampton modern" on "Muskoka South historic". Long Branch still retains its original cottage feel with low densities, low profile and many mature trees. Intensification is well known to be a chief threat to the tree canopy. We have lost over 30 beautiful trees in 5 years. OMB hearing officers do not evaluate tree matters but put a condition on thus leading to legal and illegal destruction of mature trees.

Approvals are contradictory to the general intent of Official Plan (OP) policies to respect and reinforce neighbourhood character. Density is not an issue according to the OP. The OMB has failed on so many levels. They are not only undermining City policy they are undermining the economy (see OP text.)

Generally speaking:

OMB hearing officers have little grasp of planning and no understanding of urban design, the third dimension in planning. Planning is about balancing local and city wide objectives. The client is the City electorate represented by local politicians. The development sector is to implement policies not decide them. The OMB effectively allows developers to do the planning.

Asking the OMB to judge urban design matters is like asking someone who only sees in black and white to pick a green. Since the central platform of the OP and two thirds of the policies are urban design it follows that the OMB is unsuited as the decision maker. The OMB is incredibly gullible. They cannot see that the

development planner goes further than being advocates – they lie. For example saying character depends solely on type of house. Everyone knows Provincial policies are implemented through OPs.

Development planners are wholly unqualified to comment on urban design because they have no training. If they know anything about it they are hiding it well. The typical house designs actually exaggerate the contrast and increases the lack of harmony. This is a perfect example of the blind leading the blind.

However the OMB always gives credence to development planners' opinion and never countenance the voice of the public. While the Planning Act spells out that the public should be able to shape their neighbourhood, the OMB has excluded their input. My urban design qualification and 50 years experience mean nothing to the OMB. What is more the OMB often are contemptuous of people giving non expert evidence. These people care deeply about their neighbourhood and take time off work to attend an intimidating hearing expecting it to be fair. This is an example of the establishment frustrating the wishes of the people and we know where that is leading worldwide.

The OMB is bound to consider the Committee of Adjustment decision but never do. They have influenced the Committee of Adjustment to imitate them such that the applications now average over twice the density.

According to the Divisional Court minor variances are minor in impact and size. Toronto's definition is "Small changes or exceptions to existing land use or development restrictions contained in the zoning bylaw are called minor variances." As a legal body the OMB has allowed minor variances to be major. This is the crux of the failure of the system. Because the OMB is in a universe far removed from logic it has corrupted the Committee of Adjustment situation system sometimes into a state of farce.

David Godley February 2017