



## Yorkville rallies against condo tower

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By Katherine Laidlaw, National Post

Yorkville residents are rallying against a developer's plan to turn a historic Hazelton Avenue schoolhouse into a seven-storey condominium tower.

"Hazelton is the heart of Yorkville. It always has been, always will be. It's what defines the neighbourhood, in a way," said Simon Wookey, a 37-year resident of Hazelton Avenue, who is leading the charge to "save Yorkville," with his slogan displayed prominently on signs lining the tiny street.

"The community's not opposed to re-development of the site. But the fact is, this is a historic building within a heritage conservation district."

The proposal would demolish about two-thirds of St. Basil's Catholic School, but leave the Gothic facade intact, and put a glass addition on the building that would bring it to nearly seven storeys. It was supposed to go to Toronto and East York Community Council on June 23, but the city went on strike.

In the absence of a city decision, Adam Brown, lawyer for developer Ken Zuckerman of Zinc Construction, said the firm has already taken the application to the Ontario Municipal Board, because of time constraints forced by financing requirements.

Mr. Brown filed an appeal for the property with the OMB on July 6, and says a hearing date will likely be set for September or October, depending on when the strike ends.

"We would ask the board to hold what we hope at the end of the day would be a friendly settlement hearing," he said. "We always tried to work with everyone on this."

The neighbourhood, which sees the OMB bid as an end-run around city hall, is up in arms because no public hearing was held, Mr. Wookey said. He thinks a seven-storey building would look out of place amidst the well-kept rowhouses and low-rise buildings with well-manicured lawns that line the street.

"What the community found very frustrating is the incredible sense of bad faith between the community, the city and the developer," said Mr. Wookey, whose father Richard has redeveloped many of the street's row houses. "We're losing our heritage, we're losing it everywhere."

St. Basil's Catholic School opened in 1928, and was converted to an office building for the Catholic school board in 1975. In 2002, the building was designated a heritage site by the city in the Yorkville-Hazelton Heritage Conservation District, a title which offers tighter control on changes that can be made to a neighbourhood aesthetic.

The property, sold to Mr. Zuckerman in 2005 for about \$5.5-million, has stood empty since. In the meantime, Mr. Wookey said, the building is falling into disrepair. Garbage litters the front lawn, windows are boarded up with plywood or broken, and a parking attendant booth stands next to the property's driveway, directing drivers to a 26-car lot behind the building.

Mr. Wookey says the parking lot is being run without a licence. Mr. Brown says he doesn't think that's the case.

"There's no issue that I'm aware of. They must [have a licence]," Mr. Brown said. "All of those buildings have parking behind them."

Mr. Brown said he'd be "completely shocked" if community council didn't approval the new proposal. "This is a gem in the city," he said. "It's absolutely going forward."

What concerns residents most, Mr. Wookey said, is the possibility of setting a precedent that allows developers to build higher and higher at the expense of the city's heritage.

"When the exception to the rule becomes the rule, that's when you've got a broken city," he said. "If everybody gets a variance, what's the point of having an official plan?"

*Photo of Simon Wookey outside St. Basil's Catholic School by Aaron Lynett, National Post*