

Residents angered by school relocation plans

By MOYA DILLON
May 25, 2009 4:08 PM



Print



BOOKMARK

Text



Residents of a Bayview neighbourhood confronted local representatives and school board officials at a contentious community meeting Friday, May 22 over what they perceived as a threat to expropriate their homes.

Residents were alarmed at a sketch from a Toronto Catholic District School Board (TCDSB) report that illustrates plans for the possible relocation of St. Joseph's Morrow Park Secondary School to their neighbourhood near Bayview and Steeles avenues, which is also home to Brebeuf College School and St. Agnes Catholic School.

Residents perceived the disappearance of nearby Arran Crescent from the map sketch as depicting the board's wish to expropriate their homes in order to relocate the school.

"Many of us are seniors and bought our homes 20 or 30 years ago so we could send our children to St. Agnes elementary school," said Sabina Almeida, a long-time resident who spoke to local MPP David Zimmer on behalf of the community. "We don't want our homes to be expropriated. We also went through the recent construction of Brebeuf College school and don't want to deal with more noise, dust and construction."

The TCDSB's lease on the current site of St. Joseph's Morrow Park, at Bayview and Finch avenues, runs out in 2010, with negotiations underway to extend it until 2013. The Brebeuf site is one of two options put forward by staff as possible areas to relocate the 50-year-old school. The other option is the site of St. Leonard Catholic Elementary School, which is empty.

"We are all against this whole relocation," Almeida said. "Especially since the school board already has a site at St. Leonard's that's empty. If they want to relocate a school, that's the place to do it."

Officials tried to assuage residents' fears, calling the idea of expropriation "scare mongering."

"In my view I cannot envisage a situation in which the board would, or would be allowed to, expropriate properties," Zimmer said via speaker phone from Queen's Park, addressing the nearly 50 residents assembled in his office. He promised to present the group's petition against relocation at the legislature within the next two weeks.

"I am with you on this one," he continued. "But from a practical point of view I'd say the chance of expropriation for these purposes is far above the realm of possibility."

TCDSB Trustee Maria Rizzo, whose ward encompasses the schools, also denounced the relocation, advocating the board look into ways of maintaining the school on the current site.

"It is not my preference at all to place the school at St. Agnes," Rizzo said. "You don't just pick up and move a school when it's somewhere there's already land, but the issue is always one of money."

The option of maintaining the school at its current 54-acre site, which was recently sold to Tyndale University College and Seminary, is not before the board.

The most viable proposal is the option of placing the school at St. Leonard's, which a staff report said "offers significant advantages in terms of cost, schedule and operational impact."

Richard Francki, superintendent of facilities services at the TCDSB, said the St. Agnes site was one of two options selected from five original proposals due to the size of the 16-acre site, but assured them those sites were only identified as needing further study and no final decisions had been made. When pressed about the sketch that seemed to indicate a possibility of expropriation, Francki refused to definitively state that the board would not expropriate land, but did concede the sketch was only meant to include lands already owned by the board and the omission of Arran Crescent was unintentional.

Further discussion of the issue by the board has been delayed until the August or September TCDSB board meeting due to budget deliberations.