

## **Cinespace land could be included in big box proposal**

### **OMB ruling irks neighbourhood coalition**

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**The proposal to redevelop film studio lands in Leslieville with 700,000 square feet of big box retail potentially got a lot bigger.**

**On Feb. 19, the Ontario Municipal Board ruled that the 10 acres of land occupied by Cinespace Studios at 721 Eastern Avenue could be included in the discussions of whether to let SmartCentres redevelop the Toronto Film Studios to the east as big box retail.**

**The ruling stops short of approving an application on the site - there is none at present - but it does allow the owners, a numbered Ontario company, to bring forward evidence later in the hearing to argue that its lands ought to be permitted to contain big box retail and other uses, the same as SmartCentres is requesting.**

**"They will be included in the discussion in this rezoning application, rather than having to come to the city to apply under the new legislation," said local Ward 30 (Toronto Danforth) Councillor Paula Fletcher. "This allows them to piggyback on the rezoning application."**

**The fight at the Ontario Municipal Board over those lands, currently occupied by Toronto Film Studios, has been a bitter one. SmartCentres is seeking Ontario Municipal Board approval to redevelop the 19 acres of film studios there as a 700,000 square-foot retail complex - overruling a council decision to ban big box retail from the stretch of industrial lands there.**

**Yesterday, the East Toronto Community Coalition, a neighbourhood group opposing the development, asked the Toronto Film Board to join them, Mayor David Miller and Toronto Council in petitioning the provincial government to declare a provincial interest in the matter, and simply refuse the application.**

**Randy Buck of the coalition said the most recent ruling raises the stakes dramatically on the site, which he argues should be preserved as higher-level employment lands.**

**He said with the potential inclusion of the Cinespace lands, that stretch of Leslieville could turn into a strip of retail on a scale similar to that of Scarborough's Golden Mile.**

**"The problem is that this is a generational change and we don't have an infrastructure in this area that can support several hundred thousand additional car trips today," said Buck. "There's more parking there than is available on Queen Street now. And it would be a complete barrier to the lakefront."**

**Fletcher pointed out that the addition of Cinespace increases the potential redevelopment by almost a third.**

**"It's quite a large stretch," she said. "Should the OMB grant this application, it really would create a Golden Mile in downtown Toronto, a Golden Mile in Leslieville and a Golden Mile on the waterfront."**

**Steve Mirkopoulos, president of Cinespace, couldn't be reached for comment before deadline Thursday. Likewise, the Toronto Film Board considered the deputation after press time.**