

SPACINGTORONTO

October 20th, 2006

Rejuvenating the waterfront, one big box store at a time

Posted by Dale Duncan

The land where the Toronto Film Studios sits is one step closer to being taken over by big box retail. Big box store developer Mitch Goldhar now owns a 50% stake in the east-end property, reports the Toronto Star. The deal made the front page of today's business section (and not, surprisingly enough, the front page of the entire paper).

Says Tony Wong of the Star, "The downtown land purchase is significant because there has never been a large-scale power centre in Toronto's core."

Goldhar promises he'll be sensitive to the surrounding neighbourhood. "If anything this is my home, too, and it would demand much more of my personal attention."

That this land was left vulnerable to the perils of large-scale retail (along with its large-scale parking lots and low-wage labour) is the major reason the councillor for the area, Paula Fletcher, received a thumbs down for development in Spacing's current issue. The prospect of replacing the fleeing film studios with a mixed-use development was voted down in council. Fletcher helped lead the fight fearing 14-story condo towers would take over the area were it not zoned for employment only. It's mind-boggling she doesn't see stores like Wal-Mart as big, if not bigger, a threat.

Architect Joe Lobko — who supports a mixed-use community, complete with homes, stores, business, and neighbourhood streets — spoke candidly of the danger of big box stores making their way downtown when I interviewed him last spring.

"There's a pattern across the city. This isn't the only place. Laird and Eglinton — it's a large industrial area that's rapidly becoming large scale retail. The old stock yards in the west end — formerly industrial, now large scale retail," he said. "You're getting minimum wage mcjobs. It's bullshit. They talk the talk, but in reality, you either get all residential, or nothing happens and you get shopping. Very quickly, [the film studios] will become that. It could happen just like that. The scale is perfect."