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# Big-boxed in?

## Leslieville protest of Smart Centres

By JENNY YUEN, SUN MEDIA

Leslieville wants the province to think outside the big box.

Smart Centres wants to build almost 65,000 square metres of retail space with 2,000 parking spots on a 7-hectare site at Leslie St. and Eastern Ave.

Area residents, business owners and politicians will gather at 2 p.m. today at Jimmie Simpson Park on Queen St. E. to rally the government to declare an interest in this case, set for a 12-week hearing at the Ontario Municipal Board (OMB) starting May 20.

"If they show interest, the decision at the OMB is not final until the provincial cabinet rules," area councillor Paula Fletcher said.

Smart Centres -- known for erecting Wal-Mart stores -- along with Toronto Film Studios own the sites at 629, 633 and 675 Eastern Ave. They want to rezone the land to mixed use. Currently, they're employment lands (fro smaller business use).

In March 2005, the province introduced a Places to Grow policy that helps municipalities protect employment lands.

The city, along with Toronto's film board, jumped on board in February with blocking the project.

"The jobs we have there now including film people, media and TV, are worth three times as much as retail to Toronto's economy," Fletcher said.

A Smart Centres spokesman could not be reached yesterday.

Charles Braive, a Toronto director and member of the East End Community Coalition, said big box stores would impact workers at film studios on the site. There were rumours that film workers would relocate to the newly built Filmport Studios on Commissioners St.

"Filmport will be like the Rolls-Royce of film studios," he said. "But a lot of production that happens in Toronto requires cheaper studios. The city has lost a lot of studio space over the last five years."

Fletcher estimates the big box stores would calculate into 10 million car trips into the area each year, which would increase pollution. She added that 4,000 people have e-mailed the provincial government asking for its interest because they're concerned about what their waterfront looks like.

"We took the Gardiner down, and it wasn't to build just a retail strip mall from one end of it to the other."