

LESLIEVILLE MALL**Developer woos ward to avoid OMB hearing**

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The developer of a controversial east-end shopping mall has approached the city with a proposal aimed at avoiding a costly Ontario Municipal Board hearing over the project, but so far has been rebuffed.

"Everyone on the other side knows the themes we are talking about, but we have had no meaningful conversation back from the city," Tom Smith, vice-president of development at SmartCentres Inc., which wants to build a \$220-million shopping mall in Leslieville, said in an interview.

Next Wednesday, the OMB is to begin a hearing on the SmartCentres plan to build the mall on a 7.5-hectare site on Lake Shore Boulevard east of Pape Avenue. With such a hearing looming, municipalities often try to reach last-minute agreements on projects.

"The time for a settlement would actually be now," Mr. Smith said.

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He said SmartCentre employees have fanned out in the neighbourhood to knock on doors and explain the project.

The canvassers found about 20 per cent of people opposed it, 30 to 40 per cent supported it and the remainder were neutral, Mr. Smith said. He said the canvassing turned up three main concerns: job opportunities, street improvements and environmental sustainability.

SmartCentres hired a consultant who has proposed changes to make the mall greener, and it is prepared to make improvements on adjacent streets.

"The third package of things we could do relates to jobs and reducing youth unemployment in this area, by working with social [services] providers such as WoodGreen [Community Centre] or others about apprenticeship programs and local-jobs-

first job fairs for all the opportunities in the site. That's 2,000 jobs," Mr. Smith said.

City lawyer John Payton said SmartCentres' offer is a "non-starter" because the mall is a retail project on lands zoned for other employment uses, and because the developer is not proposing changes to the physical form of the project.

Mr. Smith said the company has been talking to most council members, but because councillors tend to treat the project as a ward issue, the key councillor is Paula Fletcher. She has led the opposition to the development, which would be at the south end of her ward.

"We still believe we will be able to find common ground with the local councillor," he said.

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