

AN OPEN LETTER TO FRIENDS OF KINGSTON INNER HARBOUR

(And any other well-intentioned people who are considering waterfront 'revitalization')

Dear Friends of Kingston Inner Harbour,

We're writing this because we live in the Inner Harbour neighbourhood and love this last little patch of urban waterfront in Kingston that is used and enjoyed by the people that live here and hasn't yet been destroyed to make way for motorists, tourists and condos. We were happy that your organization played a part in fighting off Rosen's LVEC development, but more recently have watched with increasing dismay as you have moved to promote a City-sponsored 'revitalization effort' of the park and tannery. 'Revitalization' is code for 'gentrification,' especially when the City of Kingston is involved. The City's primary purpose is to raise tax revenues by promoting tourism, development, and rising property values which will push poor and working class people (including us) out of our neighbourhood.

We want to give you the benefit of the doubt and assume you are pursuing this strategy to create an 'acceptable' alternative to the proposed Wellington Street Extension. But we think your strategy will drive gentrification in our neighbourhood, whether or not this is your intention.

We are calling on you to change course.

Our waterfront is already beautiful.

We don't want Doug Fluhrer Park to look like Confederation Basin. We like dandelions, and graffiti art, and children and dogs running free. We like no cars and no tourists. We like rocky paths and uncut grass. We like having space to hang out, take a nap, and maybe even drink a beer without getting hassled by cops. We like having a picnic with our friends, neighbours or families without being interrupted by bagpipers or walking tours or hordes of hotel-dwellers.

We don't want the Davis Tannery to become just another condo development. We like the way toxic contamination has brought us such a beautiful, mysterious and wild space so close to downtown. We like the car-free streets around the playground. We hate condos and highrises. We don't want another generic, ugly housing development to bring more wealthy people into the neighbourhood.

We like living here. We like walking through the park and running into our friends. We like having spaces to go in the city that feel like home. We are asking you not to help the developers destroy one of the few places that we have left.

Revitalization = Gentrification.

In Kingston, like in other cities, plans to “beautify,” “revitalize” and “clean up” nearly always mean projects that make the downtown more palatable for the rich and tourists, starting a process of development and price hikes that push poorer people out. We call this process gentrification. A prettier park, a waterfront bike path, and a decontaminated tannery for condos to move in will eventually mean the loss of a neighbourhood where many of us and our friends can live and feel at home.

A continuous trail along the waterfront might be fun for all of us, but it’s not worth it. Renovating the park and selling off the tannery will destroy the neighbourhood as we know it, and connecting Doug Fluhner with other downtown parks will make our park just another boring, over-landscaped space for downtowners and tourists. We walk, run and cycle on or near the water almost every day, but we don’t want this.

Developers are to blame for gentrification, not students, young professionals, or neighbourhood associations. But we love our neighbourhood and it hurts to see our neighbours side with the developers against us, promoting gentrification for the sake of a bike path or nicer landscaping.

Our alternative: Leave it alone.

We call on community organizations like the FKIH to stop promoting the destruction of the neighbourhood that we love. We call on you to join us in resisting both gentrification and the Wellington Street Extension. Our communities can’t survive either of these things, and the only way to fight them effectively is to stand together.

We can fight the Wellington Extension without simply proposing a kinder, greener development effort. We can build powerful networks and use them to fight against waterfront development of any kind, regardless of whether it’s profitable for developers and their political allies. As this process drives forward and the City moves to implement one development scheme or another, lines will be drawn. We’re asking you to think seriously about what kind of neighbourhood you want and, if you love the neighbourhood that we have, join us in resisting the highways and condos that will tear it apart.

Kingston, Ontario

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