

## Why not more canal billboards?

By John Dance

Imagine if one day the condominium board of 300 Queen Elizabeth Drive erected an illuminated billboard-sized TD Bank logo high up on the canal side of their building at the corner of the Driveway and First Avenue.

The protests would be loud, furious and successful: the sign would come down and the condo owners would be deprived of a revenue stream that would have offset their monthly fees. But really the condo board would never propose such a thing and TD Bank would never try to put a billboard-size logo on the condo.

Yet TD Bank – working with the City of Ottawa and the Ottawa Sports and Entertainment Group (OSEG) – has erected a billboard-sized logo high up on the veil of the Lansdowne stadium. The sign on the veil is about the same distance from the Rideau Canal as one would be at 300 Queen Elizabeth and it has the same visual impact as it would at 300 QED: it's dominant, obtrusive and looming over our world heritage site.

So why was the TD sign on the veil allowed? First off, the rules for Lansdowne signage were substantially altered from the existing signage bylaw that previously applied. City staff failed to explain to City Council and neighbouring communities that the key deviation from the existing bylaw – changing the signage setback from the Driveway from 500 metres to just 50 – would allow staff to approve a 36-square-metre sign near the canal.

Secondly, staff implemented one

of the new rules pertaining to the illuminated TD sign in a manner that defies standards of good governance and accountability. The Lansdowne signage plan requires that a study be undertaken to confirm that any proposed illuminated sign will not be visually obtrusive when it is within canal sightlines. Staff claim they did 'such a study' yet, as a recent response to a freedom of information request stated, "no study document was produced." Who has ever heard of a legally required study being done without documentation?

Thirdly, local politicians appear to value the money generated by "naming rights" expressed through the TD sign as more important than protection of the viewscapes enjoyed by canal and parkway users and nearby residents. Mayor Jim Watson has yet to respond fully to several related questions asked in January by the president of the Old Ottawa South Community Association and councillors simply aren't willing to challenge city staff on what they have allowed.

This malaise is perhaps a reflection of a general abandonment of the value of the "commons," in this case, the visual commons. It is as though the populace and their representatives are indifferent to – or even facilitating – how corporations take over viewscapes. As one person commented on TD Bank's controversial new signs on Toronto's TD Centre – an architectural gem, "It's called naming rights and companies pay big money to have their logo placed so high." Indeed, in response to local residents' complaints



The TD sign on Lansdowne's veil dominates the skateway's viewscape east of the Bank Street bridge.



Imagine (thanks to Photoshop!) what a Driveway condo building might look like with a similar TD sign.

PHOTOS: JOHN DANCE

about the TD sign on the veil, TD Bank Vice President Chris Stamper said the TD sign is "an appropriate acknowledgement of our investment in Lansdowne Park."

Like the proposed monument for "victims of communism" on Wellington Street, the location and size of the TD sign is seen by a government to be its prerogative, with little consideration for the visual impact and the opinion of local residents.

The Rideau Canal is a UNESCO-designated world heritage site and it

has been blemished by the massive, illuminated sign on Lansdowne's veil. Our governments' failure to protect the visual commons and this world heritage site may have increased the value of Lansdowne naming rights but at what cost? In war-torn parts of the world, heritage sites are being destroyed. Here we just commercialize and devalue them.

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