

LOCAL NEWS

Lansdowne's TD Sign: Failed City and Corporate Governance



The huge TD sign on Lansdowne's veil is again illuminated and will be on until 11:30 every night. PHOTO BY JOHN DANCE

The bad news is that OSEG is again illuminating the Lansdowne veil's massive TD sign at night. The worse news is that the sign was approved as a result of city staff consulting inadequately, deviating from standard signage rules, and providing incomplete information to Councillors and others.

Last December, to the relief of many local residents, OSEG stopped illuminating the 20-foot-square green TD sign near the top of the stadium's Canal-facing veil. But now that OSEG has the ability to program lighting throughout the stadium, the veil sign will stay on until 11:30 every night, says Bernie Ashe, OSEG's CEO.

As noted in earlier articles of The OSCAR, the placement and size of the sign came as an unpleasant surprise to many. When asked about being consulted on the sign, Councillor David Chernushenko responded, "The possibility of there being a sign at all on the veil, let alone a very large one, was never highlighted to the Lansdowne Design Review Panel (LDRP)."

"Although it seems the verbiage is there in the documents, we were focusing on so many issues that something like this would only have merited our attention if it stood out in some way. I have confirmed that all five

of the LDRP members, including Peter Hume [then chair of the city's planning committee], were surprised and disappointed by the size and location of the sign when it was erected," Councillor Chernushenko concluded.

Indeed, the summary of the Lansdowne signage plan provided to planning committee makes no mention of a proposed large sign on the veil. Staff requested approval to set aside all of the standard signage bylaw provisions for the Lansdowne site because, according to the plan, "Aesthetics and design considerations, which contribute to place-making and place identity, and more subjective considerations for ensuring signage and way-finding fit with the design and place-making objectives for Lansdowne, are not adequately addressed through the [city's existing] two bylaws."

The second sentence of the plan's preface reads, "When poorly executed, signage can detract from the experience of the site by becoming an overwhelming eyesore." So the TD sign – a huge "eyesore" for many residents of OOS, the Glebe and Old Ottawa East – is hardly what we could have expected from the Lansdowne signage plan.

When the Lansdowne signage plan was discussed at planning committee, Bob Brocklebank of the Glebe Community Association and Councillor Chernushenko

asked tough questions of John Smit who was representing the city.

Mr. Smit's responses – all clearly available to anybody who wants to listen to the audio recording of the June 12, 2012 meeting – are vague and repeatedly couched in soothing phrasing such as holding Lansdowne signage to "a higher standard" and having "a much more stringent process."

Mr. Brocklebank specifically asked if the proposed blanket exemption from the standard signage bylaws was because "the problem is that you [Mr. Smit and the city] are intending to install billboards within a restrictive zone along the Queen Elizabeth Driveway."

To this Mr. Smit responded only in generalities. He had the clear opportunity to say "Yes, we will have the authority to install a large billboard-sized sign on the veil," but, instead, he did not address Mr. Brocklebank's question.

In fact, the details of the Lansdowne signage plan included one provision that was a significant variation from the standard signage bylaw to, it now seems, "allow" the huge sign on the veil. This was the provision that "No billboard sign will be installed that is within the urban park or within 50 metres of the Queen Elizabeth Driveway."

The significance of this – which was not highlighted

in the summary to planning committee nor mentioned during staff testimony at planning committee – is that the standard signage bylaws require billboards to be a minimum of 500 metres from Queen Elizabeth Drive. So staff recommended a provision that was a tenth as onerous as the standard by-law yet failed to bring this to councillors' attention.

Although the report to planning committee makes considerable reference to the Glebe and consultation with the Glebe BIA, there is no reference to Old Ottawa South and there was never any consultation with OSCA, GCA or any of the residents on Echo Drive or elsewhere. How could city staff consider it reasonable to erect and illuminate a large commercial sign that dominates the views from the Canal, Colonel By Drive and the eastern view from Bank Street bridge, without consulting those most likely to see it?

When recently asked about this, Mr. Smit, now the city's manager of policy development and urban design, responded, "The TD logo is a simple place identifier that is located on the upper part of the veil with internal lighting. It was also noted [as part of the review for the logo on the veil] that extensive landscaping would be provided at the base of the veil, and that there exists extensive mature planting on the NCC lands adjacent to Queen Elizabeth Driveway. This vegetation provides a significant visual screen between the canal corridor and the stadium veil including the logo sign on the upper part of the veil."

Perhaps Mr. Smit and his colleagues have never skated on the canal or travelled along Echo, Bank, Colonel By or Queen Elizabeth Drive. If they had, they'd know that the vegetation does not hide much of anything, let alone the TD sign near the top of the stadium.

When city council delegated authority for implementation of the Lansdowne Signage plan to staff surely they expected better judgement that what was exercised. "The veil logo reflects simplicity in design with lighting and does not overpower the architectural iconic veil element of the

stadium," says a July 16, 2014 memo from John Moser, the senior manager responsible with "delegated authority" for Lansdowne signage decisions.

Many of us disagree with Mr. Moser. As Old Ottawa East resident Rebecca Aird says, "The logo billboard on an otherwise elegant structure is aesthetically wrong and an unwelcome 'corporatization' of this urban landscape." Theresa Wallace, another OOE resident commented, "No other commercial operator or institution along the canal is allowed to put up these kinds of intrusive signs, so why does OSEG deserve the right to do what others cannot?"

In addition to the dubious conduct of city staff on Lansdowne signage, OSEG and TD Bank have not been paragons of good corporate governance on this issue. When, at the instigation of Old Ottawa South resident Tim Leah, TD Bank was challenged on having the TD logo on the veil, Chris Stamper, TD's senior vice president of corporate marketing, committed to reviewing the issue. After two months, and without consulting nearby community associations or residents, Mr. Stamper concluded that the TD sign is "an appropriate acknowledgement of our investment in Lansdowne Park."

It's as though local communities simply don't matter to these corporations, nor to the city, and that they view the commercial appropriation of the heritage "commons" of the Canal as their right.

Up until now, the City of Ottawa, OSEG and TD Bank have simply assumed that public opposition to the TD sign on the veil would just melt away and all would rejoice that TD Bank paid a lot in naming rights for this sign, thus subsidizing the Lansdowne renovations. But they're wrong.

Mayor Watson, the NCC, Parks Canada and all of those of us who do not want to be reminded on a daily basis of corporate and municipal stupidity should insist on the removal of the TD sign. And the city staff who finagled its approval should be held accountable for this fiasco.