

The Standard

More twists in plot for Port Place saga

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It's b-a-a-a-ck!

Just when you thought it was safe to read the newspaper again, the port Dalhousie tower project is rearing its ugly - uh, I mean architecturally controversial - head again.

Oh sure, there was a bit of a kerfuffle this summer over the unavailability of a videotape made of St. Catharines city council's marathon public meeting held in June.

Omni Media, a local video production company, was granted permission by the city to tape the port tower gabfest after Cogeco declined the opportunity to do so.

The company determined it didn't want the tape to be used for political purposes and, thus, opted not to release it until Niagara regional council dealt with the development application.

It was a decision that triggered in the fevered minds of some anti-tower types the usual conspiracy theories about how developer port Dalhousie Vitalization Corp. was pulling strings behind the scenes.

For those of us not being sustained intravenously by non-stop tower chatter, the dismay over the lack of public-hearing video evidence is a bit bewildering.

After all, assorted anti-tower gang members were seen taking copious notes during the hearing.

Alas, when members gathered later to compare notes, perhaps everyone had simply written down the same thing, page after page: "PDVC sucks!!!"

Along, of course, with unflattering doodles of PDVC kingpin Eric Moog and project architect Michael Kirkland.

To be fair, we're told the anti-tower forces would have liked the opportunity to show selective video evidence to regional councillors.

This strikes me as dangerous. You set up the point, attempt to drive it home with the supportive video, and, well, your kid's soccer game comes up on screen.

Of course, this comes from a guy who accidentally taped over his wedding video.

Anyway, the port place project popped up again in the news this week when the Region's planning committee members deliberated over how to conduct next month's meeting, where PDVC's application for an official plan amendment will be heard.

They took two hours discussing how to make the Oct. 12 meeting shorter.

Not exactly a good sign, huh?

While one might reasonably suspect a lot of the same old, same old will be presented at the regional meeting, a couple of new reports, commissioned by anti-tower citizens group PROUD, were dropped in councillors' laps.

One offers an unkind heritage evaluation of the port place proposal. Thus, we now have a hired-gun heritage consultant from PROUD combating PDVC's hired-gun heritage consultant.

The other report is a devastating, detailed critique of the live theatre component of the project.

I've always thought the assertion a 415-seat, privately owned theatre would succeed in port was astoundingly dumb. In her report, theatre consultant Janis Barlow says so, too, only much more eloquently.

Whether either of these latest additions to the debate will help sway regional council's decision in PROUD's favour is, of course, unknown at this point.

Don't count on it, though.

For one thing, the developers will presumably launch a counterattack.

More importantly, there is the traditional reluctance of regional council to go against the wishes of a local municipality on a major planning /development issue.

Some of St. Catharines regional councillors may speak against the proposal, but you can count on Mayor Tim Rigby making an impassioned speech about how it was his council's view that port place offers a great opportunity for economic revitalization.

Who are politicians from Fort Erie, Lincoln and Wainfleet to suggest otherwise?

Well, they serve on a council mandated to uphold the planning principles of Niagara.

Sounds great in theory.

However, faced with accusations they'd be holding back one of their member municipalities from achieving economic glory, it seldom, if ever, works out that way for regional councillors.