

CITIZEN ANNEX

Take a parking lot, put up paradise

One cheese shop employee's vision for the community

BY CLAIRE ROBERTS

Imagine walking down Bloor Street. Pass Honest Ed's and head east. Walk by the endless retail shops and restaurants, and navigate your way through the crowded streets. Travel south down Borden Street and you'll find a lush park filled with trees, flowers, and happy park-goers.

Alright, so that doesn't exist. In fact, what you will find at the end of this journey is the complete opposite—a concrete slab filled with parked cars and lined with dumpsters, better known as the Green P Parking Lot at the intersection of Borden and Bloor streets.

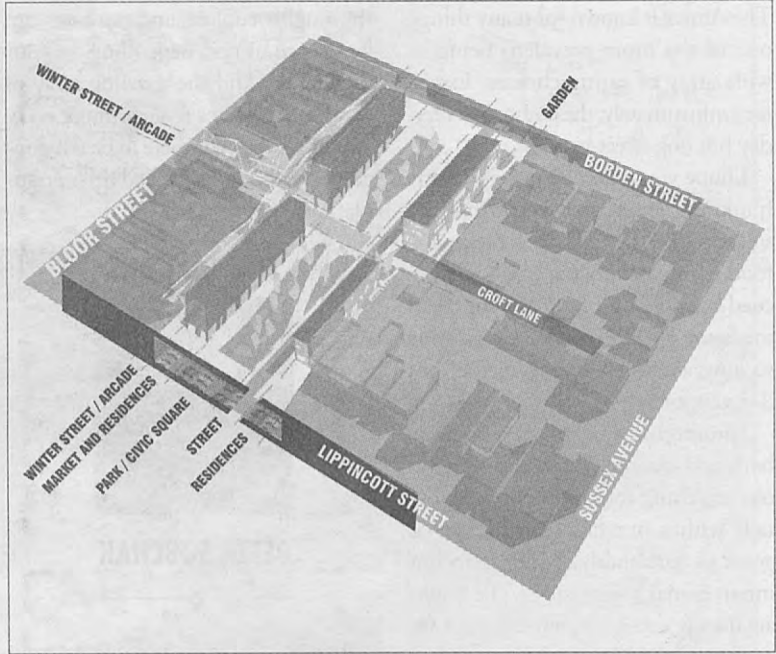
But one man's vision for change and flare for architecture has given the space potential for a new, greener life.

Yvan Mackinnon, a local resident and part-time employee of Chabichou (196 Borden St.), has plans to revitalize the parking lot and transform it into a "gathering ground" for the neighbourhood.

Mackinnon believes the parking lot should be used for something more favourable and describes his concept as a "central civic space that doesn't exist anywhere in the neighbourhood."

The idea is to utilize the parking lot as a way to transition the "busy retail sprawl" on Bloor Street to the surrounding residential neighbourhoods.

"I was looking at those moments where we transition from one proj-



A digitally rendered map of how the project would look. The plan would see the Green P parking lot at Bloor and Borden streets replaced with residential and retail spaces along the side.

ect to another, and I realized they haven't really figured out how to do this properly in Toronto. You tend to get parking or other underutilized spaces. So I was looking at how they could create a better transition from one fabric to another," he said.

By using the backside of existing buildings on Bloor Street and introducing storefronts, the space will uncover walkways and green parks amid retail and housing developments.

As a graduate of the Bartlett School of Architecture in London, England, Mackinnon used his worldly experience to present his design proposal to councillor Adam Vaughan (Ward 20, Trinity-Spadina).

As a supporter for turning parking lots into green spaces, Vaughan recognized the potential of Mackinnon's plan, and urged this forward-thinking architect to push ahead with his proposal.

Next up, Mackinnon will have to convince the members of the Harbor Village Residents' Association (HVRA).

Tim Grant, newly appointed chair of the HVRA, believes Mackinnon's plan could materialize into something suitable for the neighbourhood.

"I'm excited. I think this is a park-deficient neighbourhood and anything we can do to bring more green space is generally a good thing."

Grant believes the idea of introducing retail and housing development with the park is a dynamic way to launch Mackinnon's ideas in the community.

"The next step in all of this is to engage the local community in a consultation to discuss if they want this, and if so, to ensure the design created is the best option for everyone," Grant explained. "Until we can accommodate everyone and all issues, any final shape will materi-

alize through a consultation."

And like any sales pitch, cynicism is to be expected.

Along with a number of residents living on Brunswick Street, Dave Bradt copes with the inebriated crowds pouring out of The Brunswick House (481 Bloor St. W.) on a regular basis, and he has concerns that a park across the way could cause a stir.

"Don't get me wrong, I think it's important to have parks in the city, but a park across from the Brunny could be disastrous," Bradt said. "The park idea is interesting and could be received well; I just hope that it accommodates everyone."

When asked if this should cause a setback to his plan, Mackinnon explained that, "It's their neighbourhood and it's going to be a community based decision. We'll listen to their concerns for further development and flush out design ideas through community involvement."

Grant expressed similar intentions for community participation. "There's no point revitalizing a property like this unless it's going to benefit the adjacent community. They are the ones that will suffer the impact if it's a bad development, but they'll be the most important beneficiary group if it's a successful transition."

Mackinnon will have to fine-tune his template for the Green P parking lot and demonstrate the amount of development needed for the site, and how much impact this will have on the area.

"If the community consultation proceeded with a consensus in favour of Yvan's proposal, he would take it to Build Toronto and develop the proposal further through City Hall," Grant said.

The verdict ultimately lies in the hands of the community. Whatever the future holds, you can count on the Bloor-Borden Farmers Market re-opening in spring 2010.