

North Toronto Collegiate Institute Foundation  
70 Roehampton Avenue  
Toronto, ON M4P 1R2

November 13, 2003

Dear Co-Chairs of the North Toronto Collegiate Institute Foundation:

In response to correspondence from Cornell Wright, Breese Davies and Andy Georgiades (copy attached), that has recently come to our attention, I would like to offer the following comments.

Most cases of school redevelopment raise anxiety. We acknowledge the concerns raised in the correspondence and believe that we have taken into account these and others as we planned for the revitalization of North Toronto Collegiate. In fact, this whole project is the product of intense community involvement and consideration of all concerns.

In response to your comments, we note that our plans for North Toronto Collegiate are neither 'radical' nor 'unprecedented.' The sale of development rights on part of a property, including a school property, to finance improvements on the rest of the property is an accepted practice across North America. In the case of North Toronto, the TDSB studied alternative ways of raising funding and determined this was the only realistic way of financing rebuilding. The new school replacing the Claude Watson School for the Performing Arts on the Spring Garden site will be financed through development.

You call for an informed, vigorous public debate of all possible alternatives. In fact, the concept for the new school was created by representatives of the entire community. The North Toronto Collegiate Institute Site Redevelopment Design Team including students, teachers, school administrators, alumni and ratepayers, held four meetings. On June 12, two months after the approval of the TDSB's revitalization master plan, the team unanimously approved the land use concept for the redevelopment of the 5.3 acre NTCI site and an adjacent .78 acre lot owned by the Toronto Parking Authority.

Factually, the land on which North Toronto Collegiate is situated was not, in fact, 'given' to the current public school board. The land was purchased by the Town of North Toronto in 1912. The site became a Toronto City school when North Toronto was annexed to the City so it already has changed owners several times and through the evolution of several communities. The new school will complement the existing community. The main criterion set by the City is that this project reinforce "the continuity of the street façade (and) compatibility of scale to the buildings" in the vicinity. The City, board and Design Team believe the entire site is going to be a credit to and a centrepiece of this neighborhood.

You mention budgetary constraints. It is true the board has faced severe funding shortages since amalgamation in 1998 and, given the current budget deficit of the province, may face constraints for a long time to come. Even without such constraints, however, the plan for revitalization of North Toronto Collegiate would be the most constructively creative solution. In this way, an exemplary new school can be financed and built efficiently and economically. The public good will be very well served in the most responsible manner possible.

We won't compare this project with any other in Toronto, as you have called for us to do. Each school and each site presents different opportunities and challenges. No development should be subject to a cookie cutter approach.

You describe changes to North Toronto Collegiate as potentially jeopardizing a ‘safe, separate community’ of students. The current institution is very close to becoming unsafe and does not present a good learning environment. The school building is among the worst in our inventory and the playing field becomes a ‘lake’ when it rains, according to teachers. A teacher tells us there is a lineup of instructors waiting to take the first swing of the wrecking ball.

The development plan calls for two schools and three slender residential towers. The new North Toronto Collegiate will be a four-storey building wrapped around a 26-storey tower that fronts on Broadway Avenue in the northeast corner of the site. NTCI will house 1,200 students in its new building. The design team’s concept ensures light and views for all aspects of the buildings and each classroom, and connects the public spaces of the schools with the community at large.

At the southwest corner of the site, a four-storey French Catholic School, Conseil Scolaire de District Catholique Centre-Sud (CSDC-CS), will form the base for a 26-storey condominium tower with the school’s address on Roehampton Avenue. This school will house 500 students.

You are mistaken in your apparent belief that the new building will be substantially smaller with less room for expansion while lacking the prominence and character of the existing building. Nostalgia is a wonderful human feeling but it cannot mask the deterioration of this 91-year-old structure that has no unique architectural feature and completely outdated functionality. In fact, the new school will benefit from smaller, more efficient mechanical rooms and service spaces and an increase in learning space. There will be new science and computer labs, larger music rooms, an 80 percent larger library, 8,000 additional square feet in gym space, larger staff facilities and more green space for the field instead of the hemmed-in surroundings you imagine. The new building will be, in the opinion of professional architects and designers, an architectural gem.

Your letter talks of renovating the old North Toronto Collegiate building just as we have done with other schools without the sale of building rights on properties. Some of these other revitalization projects were accomplished under a quite different funding model and others were very different in physical terms. We considered carefully the possible renovation of the old building but dismissed this notion as totally impractical. This is a decaying structure full of problems that would frustrate any attempt to restore it in an economical, responsible way. The new building presents a learning environment far surpassing anything possible in a renovated school.

It is quite true that North Toronto Collegiate has been a community landmark for 91 years but it is the spirit of the school and the achievements of the students and educators that have been responsible for this status. Most schools throughout North America have had structural changes in their histories but these are not what constitute character; it is the human aspect of each school that marks it and we believe North Toronto’s spirit will be strengthened greatly by this revitalization. NOW Magazine may believe the building is worth saving but architects and the Toronto Historical Board do not mark it as special, nor do the majority of teachers and students who have to tolerate its many shortcomings.

You remark in your letter that, “The school is a magnet for students and parents from all over the city who appreciate the school’s long tradition of high academic standards and excellence in music, athletics, student leadership, and extracurricular activities.” We agree and note that none of the attributes you list depend on the physical structure. All are currently being hampered by the deterioration of the building.

The TDSB moved forward with this plan for revitalization after years of debate, careful planning, negotiations with the City and community involvement.

At this time, there is no indication at all that a contemplated change in the education funding formula will have any impact on this project at all since it does not include capital for rebuilding or renovation of schools. There simply is no need to delay this much-needed project to replace an obsolete, worn-out school building. A delay at this late stage would be irresponsible. We know several of you, as lawyers, will understand the importance of meeting schedules and deadlines when dealing with an undertaking of this size.

As attorneys, you will also know that, contrary to what you state in your letter, this project does not have 'enormous implications for the local community and for public schools all across Ontario.'

For the local community, the effect of a revitalized North Toronto Collegiate is not implied, it is clear. The community's students and educators will benefit greatly through a brand new school with more usable space and the safest, most comfortable learning environment possible. The school's spirit and its marvelous record of student achievement will be undimmed and will be commemorated in the new building. The community will grow and be enhanced by well-designed, well-built residences.

Just as it has always been, North Toronto Collegiate will be one of a kind, a great school primarily because of the abilities, will and pride of its students, parents, teachers and staff. And, in September, 2007, North Toronto Collegiate will be housed in a new school building designed by its entire community.

I encourage the continued participation of the NTCI Association in the on-going development of this school building to assist us all in achieving our objective of making this new building a great piece of architecture worthy of the current and past student of North Toronto.

Could you please ensure that this letter is copied to your Foundation members.

Yours sincerely;



Sheila Penny  
Executive Superintendent  
Facility Services

cc. TDSB School Trustees  
David Reid, Director of Education  
Rauda Dickinson, School Superintendent  
Ashley Waltman, Principal, NTCI  
NTCI Foundation Advisory Board  
Beth Brown and Eric Miglin, Co-Chairs, NTCI Parents' Association  
Hon. Gerard Kennedy, Minister of Education  
Hon. Michael Bryant, MPP  
Michael Walker, City Councillor  
NTCI Design Team  
Oriole Park Association  
Sherwood Park Association  
Federation of North Toronto Residents' Association  
Annie Kidder, People for Education

Original Message-----

**From:** Cornell Wright [mailto:cornell.wright@sympatico.ca]

**Sent:** November 4, 2003 9:24 PM

**To:** Wright, Cornell

**Subject:** Fw: North Toronto Collegiate

I am writing to you as a fellow graduate of North Toronto Collegiate.

You may have read in the newspaper or heard about the proposal to "redevelop" North Toronto Collegiate by demolishing the school, selling off part of the land to a private condominium developer and using the proceeds to build a new smaller school. Breese Davies ('91), Andy Georgiades ('92) and I are part of a large and growing group of former students, teachers and parents of North Toronto Collegiate who are deeply concerned about this proposal. Before it proceeds further, we want to make sure that there is a full and open debate about all possible alternatives.

Below is a letter we are planning to send to the school board. We would like to include with the letter a list of NTCI alumni and friends who share the concerns expressed in the letter. Please read the letter. If you share our concerns, please send me an e-mail with your name and year of graduation (if applicable). Please also send this letter to any other Friends of NTCI - brothers and sisters, parents, neighbours, family and friends - and ask them to send me an e-mail at [cornell.wright@sympatico.ca](mailto:cornell.wright@sympatico.ca) with their name and year of graduation (if applicable). We would like to include the names of as many people as possible on our list. Please make sure we receive all names by the end of the day on **Thursday, November 13th.**

The school board has indicated that there will be a public meeting to discuss the proposal. The meeting is scheduled for November 27th at 7:30 pm in the NTCI auditorium. We urge you to attend.

Best regards,

Cornell Wright ('92)

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Ms. Sheila Penny  
Executive Superintendent, Facility Services  
Toronto District School Board  
5050 Yonge Street  
Toronto, Ontario  
M2N 5N8

Dear Ms. Penny:

We are part of a large and growing group of former students, teachers and parents of North Toronto Collegiate who are deeply concerned about the proposal to "redevelop" North Toronto Collegiate by demolishing the school, selling off part of the land to a private condominium developer and using the proceeds to build a new smaller school. This proposal is radical and unprecedented and must not proceed further without an informed, vigorous public debate of all possible alternatives.

The land on which North Toronto Collegiate is situated was given to the public school board for the benefit of the school and the community. It should not be sold to private developers. You have suggested that, given current budgetary constraints, the school board needs to adopt creative solutions to improve its schools. We agree. However, selling school land to private developers is not a creative solution. It is an easy, short-sighted solution that will provide a quick profit for the board but ultimately be detrimental to the school and the community.

Many other schools beyond North Toronto Collegiate also sit on prime real estate. Is the school board's plan to sell off other school land to private developers? Examples of schools with land that would be ripe for private development include John Fisher Public School, Northern Secondary School, Lawrence Park Collegiate, Parkdale Collegiate, Bloor Collegiate and Central Technical School.

## Attachment

Currently, North Toronto Collegiate's land and building design create a separate campus in the burgeoning Yonge-Eglinton area. Students are part of a safe, separate community in which they can learn, socialize and explore extra-curricular pursuits without being in the way of people who live and carry on business nearby. Under the proposal, the school will be surrounded by three 24-30 storey condominium towers. Other than the playing field, there will be almost no other outside space for students and the community. In addition, the new building will be substantially smaller and have less room for future expansion. The new building will also lack the prominence and character of the existing building.

The school board has already committed \$14 million for capital improvements at North Toronto Collegiate. You have indicated publicly that it would cost \$16-18 million "to fully renovate" the existing school. Although the \$14 million already committed would not cover this entire cost, it would undoubtedly make a substantial improvement. Other sources of funding should be explored to make further improvements to the building without selling off the school's land. Indeed, many secondary schools in Toronto have been renovated and rebuilt without private development, including Riverdale Collegiate, Earl Haig Secondary School, Harbord Collegiate, East York Collegiate, and Forest Hill Collegiate.

North Toronto Collegiate has been a community landmark for over 90 years. NOW Magazine recently identified it as one of ten buildings in Toronto worth saving. The school is a magnet for students and parents from all over the city who appreciate the school's long tradition of high academic standards and excellence in music, athletics, student leadership, and extra-curricular activities.

The new provincial government is committed to reviewing the education funding formula to ensure that school boards have adequate resources to repair, renovate and rebuild aging schools. Indeed, the new government has established a Ministry of Public Infrastructure Renewal to support the revitalization of schools and other public institutions. The new Minister of Education has terminated the TDSB supervisor and indicated that the school trustees elected on November 10th will be given full decision-making authority. Given all of these recent developments, now is not the time to race ahead with this proposal.

There are serious flaws in the process that led to this decision. There was no consultation with the community before the plan to demolish the school was announced. Nor has there been any discussion of alternatives. The school board claims that there is support for this proposal. However, given the lack of consultation and the fact that there has been no discussion of alternatives, this claim has no credibility.

Before this proposal proceeds further, we urge you to ensure that there is a full, public discussion of all possible alternatives. This issue has enormous implications for the local community and for public schools all across Ontario. It deserves a full and open debate.

Yours truly,

Breese Davies ('91)  
Andy Georgiades ('92)  
Cornell Wright ('92)

Copy:  
TDSB School Trustees  
David Reid, Director of Education  
Rauda Dickinson, School Superintendent  
Ashley Waltman, Principal, NTCI  
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Michael Walker, City Councillor  
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Federation of North Toronto Residents' Association  
Annie Kidder, People for Education

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