

From: Tanya Mars [<mailto:tanya.mars@utoronto.ca>]
Sent: May 9, 2020 8:06 AM
To: Councillor Bailao <Councillor_Bailao@toronto.ca>
Subject: 17 Paton and Unaffordable Toronto for Artists

Dear Councillor and Deputy Mayor Ana Bailão,

I am writing to you as a senior artist who has lived and worked in Toronto since 1979. At that time as an affordable city for artists, Toronto became the mecca for artists from across Canada and through the 80s, 90s, and 00s we built a vibrant and exciting visual arts community here.

What has happened in that time? Artists consistently moved into low-rent, light-industrial areas of the city and inhabited buildings that were left empty as manufacturing moved to the suburbs and/or other countries. In every instance these communities soon became attractive to small business and eventually developers (much to our chagrin). Yorkdale, Queen West, Liberty Village, Mercer Street, and now The Junction and Parkdale are among the neighbourhoods that are no longer affordable for artists, particularly artists who were unable or uninterested in buying houses. That gentrification has come at a great cost to those who are vulnerable to the whims of the market. Rents since 2015 have DOUBLED or TRIPLED and what you can get for that rent has been woefully reduced.

Toronto boasts that we are a world-class city, inviting people to visit and relocate here. I would argue that Toronto is no longer a livable city for artists or anyone who doesn't have two high paying incomes. We are being pushed further and further away from Toronto, and what do you think will be the consequences of this move? Yes, we'll have the Drakes and some movie stars may choose to live here for a time and those who have managed to break into a world market, but let's be realistic, Canada does not have a market-driven, U.S. style art system. Canada has an artist-run, self-determined system of art, one that supports experimentation. This system is what makes us unique in the world, it is what helps to give Toronto a rich, diverse, expansive cultural communities (note: COMMUNITIES) that thrive. All of the things that

Toronto boasts. These things will disappear.

Toronto has failed to keep up with building affordable housing; has failed to implement rent controls (until recently); has failed to put adequate checks in place for air b'n'b businesses (a big loss for renters); has failed to encourage the building of apartments over condominiums. (Not to speak of woefully inadequate public transit.)

What incentives have you put in place for current landlords to maintain affordable spaces for artists and other low-income renters? What assurances do you have for renters at all? The talk is all about buying, buying, buying . . . well, then, let the city buy some buildings for artists. (Yes I know there is Artscape, but while Artscape is great, not everyone qualifies and the units are small, artists often prefer industrial space).

The current situation at 17 Paton Road is a result of all of the city's failures. I understand that you, together with City Building and City Fire Chiefs, have chosen to evacuate several artists from their homes/studios rather than find a way to work with the tenants and landlords to upgrade the building to meet city building codes. It is shameful. As a city of wealth, where are the benefactors? Where is the compassion? Where is the resolve to support the kind of creatives who have helped to make this city what it is today?

What are you, Ms. Bailao, going to do about it? I implore you to take a firm stand, to find a way to keep Parkdale, Parkdale and not turn it into Yorkdale North. And this should be only the first step toward the revitalization of affordable housing investment by the city of Toronto.

If this pandemic has taught us anything, it has taught us that ANYTHING is possible where there is the will. I expect you and other city councillors and inspectors to find a way to make this right.

Stop the eviction. Make it work.

Sincerely,
Tanya Mars
Artist

Associate Professor, University of Toronto (retired 2020)

Recipient of Governor General's Award in Media and Visual Arts, 2009

Ps: Even with my pension, I will not be able to continue to live in Toronto in a year or two. This makes me incredibly sad.