

## Casinos, landfills lead thumbs-down list: Survey

**Bob Finnigan**

Casinos, landfills and aggregate quarries rank 1, 2, 3 on the list of development proposals Canadians are most likely to oppose in their area, while single-family homes, hospitals, grocery stores and apartments/condos, in that order, are much more acceptable, according to the Saint Index (don't confuse Saint with saint).

The Saint Index comes from a public opinion survey of 1,223 Canadians by the Saint Consulting Group, a new firm in town with 25 years of experience in the U.K. and U.S. It specializes in winning zoning and land use battles for development proponents.

At first, I was pleasantly surprised to see condos and single-family homes among the list of developments that people support, but I'm sure that's compared with the alternatives. Given a choice between a low-rise residential development and a landfill, homes would always win. On the other hand, had Saint offered people the choice between single-family homes and the status quo (no development) as an option, I'm sure the results would have been different. Digging deeper into the survey results, my hunch was confirmed. Saint found that 75 per cent of Canadians say their community is already overdeveloped or fine the way it is, while just one quarter of respondents want new development.

Why are Canadians opposing development in their communities? The most common response is to protect the character of the community followed by protecting green space, traffic concerns and proximity to home. Collectively, these objections add up to what is called the NIMBY (not in my backyard) syndrome and it's likely behind the public's cynicism when it comes to the local government decision-making process.

Saint found 55 per cent believe their local government is doing only "fair to poor" on decisions regarding planning and zoning and 60 per cent feel the relationship between elected officials and developers makes the process unfair. Voters in local elections are paying much closer attention to candidates' positions on new development, with 87 per cent saying it affects how they vote. As Saint says, "the days when politicians supported development projects for tax dollars and new jobs are ending. Today's savvy politician understands the politically expedient move is to stand with the opponents."

That explains why local politicians tell us privately they support a project but they can't publicly come out in favour of it.

The concern I have with all this is that we have a Greater Golden Horseshoe Growth Plan premised on the fact that the GGH is expected to grow by an additional 3.7 million people by 2031. These people have to live somewhere and the Growth Plan directs much of that growth inward (40 per cent of annual development must be within a municipality's existing boundary) and upward, versus sprawling outward. This all sounds great on paper but it's exactly what the NIMBYs don't want and they have a very large political voice.

Something's got to give here because there's just way too much time, money and energy being wasted fighting this growth. It's going to happen. It's time to start embracing it. NIMBYs, politicians, the building industry and everyone else have to work together to create the will and the way to get new residential developments built and at the same time create a GTA we can all be proud of. It's our future!

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