

# Riverdale Hospital demolition: Environmental evidence against

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The Ontario Municipal Board (OMB) supports Bridgepoint Health's and the City of Toronto's wish to demolish the Riverdale Hospital Half-Round building. The Citizens for Riverdale Hospital while supporting the building of a new hospital cannot accept the demolition of the 'Half-Round', wishing instead for a co-existence of the two buildings. In Bridgepoint's insistence on demolition and its inherent pollution, Bridgepoint and the City appear to ignore the environmental cost by relying on outdated anti pollution standards, despite the knowledge that the standards are too low-grade.

To build incurs not just a financial cost, but as well environmental and health costs. The financial cost for most matters most, but we tend to forget, just as with driving, we create an environmental and a health cost. To build in fact becomes an imposition on the atmosphere and the neighbourhood. This cost registers as greenhouse gas and pollution. There are many environmental impacts from these sources. As one of many examples, the incidence of premature deaths due to smog and greenhouse gas (GHG), as reported by the Ontario Medical Association, is skyrocketing.

The public insists that governments take action on GHG. The City of Toronto Council in its Green Development Plan adopts anti smog measures in planning and infrastructure usage. The Ontario Government initiates its Anti Smog campaign. The Liberal Federal Government made an attempt at this with signing the Kyoto Protocol and with its "One Tonne Challenge". The City's Official Plans set goals for CO<sub>2</sub> emission reductions.

Creating environmental policies and goals is a hollow act if the progressive measures are completely ignored in practice. The public is the big loser here, as the Hospital and the City appear to be failing to follow their own adopted policies and goals, and the OMB is not fulfilling its mandate that planning legislation be adhered to. As evidenced by much proof from climate scientists, the earth is in jeopardy with global warming. Further to this, as evidenced by City of Toronto Public Health Department publications, for many people's respiratory organs cannot absorb the pollution any longer. (David Suzuki's Canary in the Coalmine analogy).

We have to act to avoid pollution where it is obvious and where practical alternatives exist. The practical alternative to demolition is to re-use the building. However, this option was not even considered. The Provincial government should not fund the demolition of an excellent building with so little thought to future need. The Citizens for Riverdale Hospital want the owners and its consultants to be serious about the three Rs, to put into practice the concept of re-use, to turn the building into something else.

Decision makers, including the Hospital and the City of Toronto have to take responsibility and need to function as public stewards. They are required by the policies and legislation to apply environmentally effective thinking, to make use of what we, as a society, already own. In this instance: a large well-built structure, known as the Riverdale Hospital 'Half-Round', that is merely 45 years old. Experts pointed out it would take 6 months to shake and rattle this edifice to the ground and truck it away as waste, instead of reusing it to serve society's need.



Environmental damage is seen by many as merely an inconvenient headache instead of a societal disaster in the making. As noted by the flood of writings, major decision makers are reluctant to act on climate change, smog pollution, health impacts etc. because it appears to be a too radical a thought, impractical and appears to be not about 'business as usual'.

Be assured that tearing down and re-erecting a concrete reinforced building fits right up there in terms of environmental damage. We have the environmental cost of the original cost of construction in 1964, next the demolition of this building and then the inevitable remaking of the space, (while in a different form) in the next few years. It is estimated that just the concrete production alone required for these buildings produces 75,000 tons of carbon dioxide, a major contributors to GHG and to smog. The associated health and economic impacts on the Citizens of Toronto are fully described by the Ontario Medical Association (see note). By extrapolation, Bridgepoint Health's unwavering decision to demolish, is unnecessarily hurting the well-being of the very people it serves, the people of Riverdale and Cabbage town, its immediate neighbours - some 200,000 people.

The demolition of the building will bring about 27,000 tonnes of waste. The hospital's environmental experts offered that this material can be recycled, as road fill aggregate. **This type of recycling needs to be exposed as being woefully substandard because of its degraded utility after use.** Therefore it cannot be considered to be sustainable as previously the material constituted an entire building. Furthermore it ignores the massive investment of natural capital involving **huge quantities of water, aggregates and most of all, the greenhouse gas-producing energy required to source and make the material.** Sustainability experts know that it takes the biosphere, and the city within it, 50 years to absorb this toll, in other words, to restore the extraction, to absorb the GHG and smog. The building is only 43 years old. It hasn't even reached its 'break-even point' and if Bridgepoint has its way, it's to be razed - and then it can do this all again using (at least) 27,000 tonnes of concrete, incurring the same public health price, punctuating this with a 6 month demolition period.

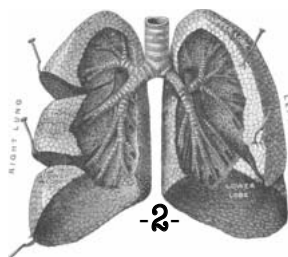
In eagerness Bridgepoint Health looks into its own future, and forgets ours. As a logical outcome of being proactive, ready for upcoming challenges, treating growing chronic disease, surely Bridgepoint should realize that it is exacerbating the very problem the public expects it to be concerned with. Designers need to be reminded that their decisions impact public health. Yet the lead consultant Urban Strategies claimed to not have even considered retaining the building.

This situation can be turned around by two options. First, the Province can refuse to fund this decision. Second, more positively, the hospital can take a leadership role in brownfield development by showing the public how to re-use a large building for any number of uses. For instance, 450 retired people could be accommodated in this 316,000 sq.ft building.

The hospital needs to be asked to reconsider, to avoid this complete wastage of infrastructure and public funds. To avoid using the inevitable capital cost, to both demolish and to then eventually rebuild. If it so did, Bridgepoint, its consultants, the Riverdale and Cabbage town Residents, all come through as winners.

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*1 The Ont. Medical Association, in its 2005-2006 report states that smog is responsible for 5800 premature deaths due to lung disease.*



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[www.torarchcons.org](http://www.torarchcons.org)