

commentary



This is a water colour rendering of The Crossing, a mixed-used development proposed by Troy Northrup for Saint John's east side. Northrup says the project can make Saint John a 'drive-in', not a 'drive-by' city. PHOTO SUBMITTED

Creating a 'drive-in', not 'drive-by' Saint John

TROY NORTHRUP
COMMENTARY

In March, the City of Saint John's Planning Advisory Committee will consider an application for a municipal plan amendment and rezoning to permit the construction of The Crossing, a large-scale, highway gateway development to be located between Ashburn Road and the Saint John Thruway.

Since announcing the project in January, we've received much positive feedback. We've heard from others whose legitimate questions about the project needed answers. We thank The Crossing's neighbours for meeting and listening to us, and for their suggestion that we share this information with the wider community.

The Crossing's Purpose: A New Gateway to Entice Drivers to Stop, Stay and Explore

So what exactly is The Crossing? First of all, it is not a traditional retail centre. The Crossing is a 180 acre, multi-phase, mixed-use development for community, commerce, hospitality and tourism. It will be unlike anything in eastern Canada. I like to think of it as a new front door – a gateway – for our city. The Crossing received its name because of its strategic position at the convergence of four major arteries – Rotheray Avenue, Rotheray Road, Foster Thurston Drive and the Saint John Thruway. It is ideally situated to greet both visitors and area residents to our community with a wide range of quality services. These services will be complemented by the creation of a planned community featuring a quality high-density residential neighbourhood, lifestyle and speciality services like hair salons, dry cleaners, courier

services, a neighbourhood pharmacy and a bakery to give a few examples. It will also feature a business park and office space for organizations that desire and may need highway access and high visibility but which do not fit into a traditional industrial park.

When combined with an information centre, a hotel cluster, restaurants and other amenities desired by commuters, tourists and residents, The Crossing will become an extremely attractive and functional community. In short, The Crossing is designed and ideally located to encourage people to stop, enter and stay in Saint John instead of driving past it. Its services are designed to complement existing businesses and merchants by providing convenient infrastructure that currently does not exist in Saint John. Indeed, The Crossing has been planned to entice drivers into the city where other businesses and services will benefit from their support.

Flood Plain Management Plan in Place

A key question about The Crossing concerns storm-water and flood-plain management. To address this issue, we hired some of the best consultants and engineers in the business. Among them is WSP Canada Inc. (formerly known as Terrain Group). Considered one of the world's leading engineering consulting firms, WSP completed an extensive hydrology and hydraulic report for the proposed site.

That report estimates that when fully developed, the project would use just 17,000 cubic metres of flood storage, a small fraction of the identified 400,000 cubic metres of water storage on the property.

Furthermore, WSP identified

another 125,000 cubic metres of potential flood-plain storage on nearby city-owned lands.

Engineers determined that The Crossing development will have no negative impact on flooding in the Marsh Creek watershed. We are happy to share WSP's findings and we look forward to working with the City of Saint John, and other authorities, to develop ways to improve current conditions and help manage the local watershed. The project will follow all environmental regulations. Nothing will be built before approvals are received.



As a Saint John business owner and developer, I am passionate about our community's future. This is my home.

Conservation and social benefits will also become an important component of The Crossing. One-third of the 180-acre site will be set aside as green space and retained in its natural state. We endorse ACAP's vision for this area which includes walking and biking trails along the restored Marsh Creek. We look forward to working with them to give outdoor enthusiasts new recreational opportunities.

An Economic Opportunity Created in Saint John

As a Saint John business owner and developer, I am passionate about our community's future. This is my home. I also believe most opportunities for our city will be created by local people willing to invest and take risk. I have two goals for The Crossing: to make it a successful development, and to help showcase Greater Saint John in a way never before seen. When others succeed, we all benefit.

Over the course of its development, The Crossing will provide tax-base growth valued in millions of dollars for Saint John and employment opportunities both during construction and for the long term.

Our community needs every advantage it can muster. New Brunswick and Saint John are getting ready for the potential opportunities Energy East could bring. As a community we need to be in a position to execute and take advantage of these opportunities.

We've seen recent announcements from Irving Oil that show tremendous faith in our community. In my view, creating a welcoming, easy-to-see and accessible open door like The Crossing will enhance people's perception of our community.

We have an impressive, grand vision for The Crossing property that will create a dramatic, gateway entrance for Saint John and an exceptional neighbourhood for those who choose to live there. My No. 1 hope is that The Crossing makes Saint John a 'drive-in' city, not a 'drive-by' city. That is a goal I believe all citizens and business operators will support.

Troy Northrup

is the president of Horizon Management Inc., the developer behind The Crossing

Allow free vote on assisted suicide



Chantal Hebert national affairs

When the House of Commons votes on medically assisted suicide later this year, it will be making history in two controversial ways.

So far, only a handful of countries have included the option of assisted suicide in their end-of-life medical protocol. The upcoming legislation will be taking Canada in relatively uncharted social policy waters.

And then in contrast with comparable debates pertaining to the death penalty, abortion rights and same-sex marriage, this one will see the Liberal Party break with the tradition of allowing its MPs – even when it is in government – to vote freely on so-called issues of conscience.

It is hard to quarrel with the notion that medically assisted suicide falls in the limited category of policies that stand to go against the deeply held personal convictions of some MPs. When it adopted a law along similar lines, the Quebec national assembly held a free vote.

At the federal level, the Conservatives will not impose a party line on their MPs. Nor will the NDP. In contrast with reproductive rights, the New Democrats have historically not championed medically assisted suicide. They, like their Conservative colleagues, will be free to make up their own minds as to whether to support the bill. But the Liberal decision to forgo a free vote is part of a broader change designed to ensure Justin Trudeau's caucus walks the talk of the party's professed commitment to charter rights. That was not always the case in the past with divisions surfacing on votes on abortion and gay rights.

The new approach was part and parcel of the recent Liberal platform.

It could also be argued that forcing the party line on the majority Liberals removes any uncertainty as to the fate of the bill in the Commons.

After the courts ruled in favour of same-sex marriage just over a decade ago, many MPs who had previously supported the definition of marriage as a union between a man and a woman changed their stance.

To make supporting the bill even easier, MPs will not actually be asked to give the green light to medically assisted suicide. That ship sailed when the Supreme Court struck down the Criminal Code sections that prohibited it.

The main purpose of the legislation currently being drafted against a court-imposed June deadline is to avoid a patchwork system of end-of-life care by putting in place a common national framework.

All that being said, in its quest to present a united front on an issue involving a charter right, Trudeau's government may be doing a disservice to the debate and to the legislation that will result from it.

One of the strengths of the Quebec law is that it was supported freely by a majority of MNAs of every political stripe. The four parties came away from the discussion feeling they had all had real input in the process. As a result, the Quebec law is not at the mercy of a change in government and – even as it remains controversial in some circles – it is hard to make a case that is the product of an artificially imposed consensus.

And then, in contrast with their elected colleagues, all senators will be free to vote as they please on the legislation. By forgoing a free vote in the House of Commons, Trudeau is inviting the groups that are lobbying against the measure to make their stand in the upper house.

Chantal Hebert
is a Toronto Star columnist

Court impasse shows the ungovernable America

PAUL KRUGMAN
COMMENTARY

Once upon a time, the death of a Supreme Court justice wouldn't have brought America to the edge of constitutional crisis. But that was a different country, with a very different Republican Party. In today's America, with today's GOP, the passing of Antonin Scalia has opened the doors to chaos.

In principle, losing a justice should cause at most a mild disturbance in the national scene. After all, the court is supposed to be above politics. So when a vacancy appears, the president should simply nominate, and the Senate approve, someone highly qualified and respected by all.

In reality, of course, things were never that pure. Justices have always had known political leanings, and the process of nomination and approval has often been contentious. Still, there was nothing like the situation we face now, in which Republicans have more or less unanimously declared that President Barack Obama has no right even to nominate a replacement for Scalia – and no, the fact that Obama will leave soon doesn't make it

OK. (Justice Anthony Kennedy was appointed during Ronald Reagan's last year in office).

Nor were the consequences of a court vacancy as troubling in the past as they are now. As everyone is pointing out, without Scalia the justices are evenly divided between Republican and Democratic appointees – which probably means a hung court on many issues.

And there's no telling how long that situation may last. If a Democrat wins the White House and the GOP holds the Senate, when if ever do you think Republicans would be willing to confirm anyone the new president nominates?

How did we get into this mess? At one level the answer is the ever-widening partisan divide. Polarization has measurably increased in every aspect of American politics, from congressional voting to public opinion, with an especially dramatic rise in "negative partisanship" – distrust of and disdain for the other side. And the Supreme Court is no different. As recently as the 1970s the court had several "swing" members, whose votes weren't always predictable from

partisan positions, but that centre now consists only of Kennedy, and only some of the time.

But simply pointing to rising partisanship as the source of our crisis, while not exactly wrong, can be deeply misleading. First, decrying partisanship can make it seem as if we're just talking about bad manners, when we're really looking at huge differences on substance. Second, it's really important not to engage in false symmetry: Only one of our two major political parties has gone off the deep end.

On the substantive divide between the parties: I still encounter people on the left (although never on the right) who claim that there's no big difference between Republicans and Democrats, or at any rate "establishment" Democrats. But that's nonsense. Even if you're disappointed in what Obama accomplished, he substantially raised taxes on the rich and dramatically expanded the social safety net; significantly tightened financial regulation; encouraged and oversaw a surge in renewable energy; moved forward on diplomacy with Iran.

Any Republican would undo all of that, and move sharply in the opposite direction. If anything, the consensus among the presidential candidates seems to be that George W. Bush didn't cut taxes on the rich nearly enough, and should have made more use of torture.

When we talk about partisanship, then, we're not talking about arbitrary teams, we're talking about a deep

divide on values and policy. How can anyone not be "partisan" in the sense of preferring one of these visions?

And it's up to you to decide which version you prefer. So why do I say that only one party has gone off the deep end?

One answer is, compare last week's Democratic debate with Saturday's Republican debate. Need I say more?

Beyond that, there are huge differences in tactics and attitudes. Democrats never tried to extort concessions by threatening to cut off U.S. borrowing and create a financial crisis; Republicans did. Democrats don't routinely deny the legitimacy of presidents from the other party; Republicans did it to both Bill Clinton and Obama. The GOP's new Supreme Court blockade is, fundamentally, in a direct line of descent from the days when Republicans used to call Clinton "your president."

So how does this get resolved? One answer could be a Republican sweep – although you have to ask, did the men on that stage Saturday convey the impression of a party that's ready to govern? Or maybe you believe – based on no evidence I'm aware of – that a populist rising from the left is ready to happen any day now. But if divided government persists, it's really hard to see how we avoid growing chaos.

Maybe we should all start wearing baseball caps that say, "Make America governable again."

Paul Krugman
is a New York Times columnist