



Bob Aaron bob@aaron.ca

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Turf war over who names the neighbourhoods

Toronto residents who are proud to live in areas such as Harbourfront, Davisville Village, Leslieville, Chaplin Estates, Hogg's Hollow and Corktown are bound to be disappointed to learn that their neighbourhood names have been wiped off the map by the City of Toronto and the Toronto Real Estate Board.

This also applies to the neighbourhoods of Baby Point, Rathnelly, Brockton, Seaton Village, the Distillery District, Christie Pits and others.

The confusion arises in the wake of a decision by the Board in July to replace its old district map to simplify searching for properties on the Multiple Listing Toronto Real Estate Service (MLS) and its public site, www.realtor.ca.

As a result, there are now at least four different authoritative sources for naming and defining Toronto neighbourhoods and none of them completely agrees with any of the others.

- The "official" Toronto neighbourhood maps are published by the City of Toronto and available on the city's website at www.toronto.ca. According to the city's listing, there are 140 Toronto neighbourhoods.
- The newly adopted Toronto Real Estate Board maps are found at www.torontomls.net/BingCommunitiesMap/map.html. TREB says that there are 144 Toronto neighbourhoods. In scrapping its old district names like C11, TREB intended to use commonly known names and geographical areas, but I find it more confusing than ever.
- In his landmark book *Your Guide to Toronto Neighbourhoods*, now in its fifth edition, (<http://www.torontoneighbourhoods.net/book-orders>) David Dunkelman provides a detailed description of 164 Toronto neighbourhoods. The book is well-researched, detailed, and up-to-date. Dunkelman's neighbourhood descriptions are online at <http://www.torontoneighbourhoods.net/>.
- My personal favourite, and the one with the most neighbourhood listings, is the brainchild of Toronto real estate broker John Pasalis at www.realosophy.com. Hundreds of hours of effort have gone into dividing the city up into an incredible 167 discrete areas and mapping them out. Each one shows an overview, homes for sale, home data, demographics, description and "walk score" rating.

The Realosophy terminology uses area names that are in common use by real people — not ones invented by a TREB committee or municipal bureaucrats.

Not only are we now left with four different lists ranging from 140 to 167 neighbourhood names, no one seems to agree on the names or boundaries of the neighbourhoods.

This results in what I refer to as "neighbourhood creep." (I'm not, of course, referring to the strange guy in the trench coat who hangs out at the local doughnut shop.) I mean the tendency of real estate agents, homeowners and developers to expand the traditional limits of upscale neighbourhoods into adjacent but less desirable areas for marketing purposes.

Neighbourhood creep occurs when the commonly accepted boundaries of trendy areas like Rosedale, Moore Park, the Beach, the Annex or Forest Hill creep outwards when nearby homes go on the market. It's far more desirable to advertise a home as being in Rosedale than it would be to say it's "just six blocks" from Rosedale.

This also happened when Forest Hill Lofts was built in an area considerably west of the limits of Forest Hill.

Areas next to the traditional limits of Cabbagetown, too, have morphed into names like South Cabbagetown and West Cabbagetown due to neighbourhood creep. Areas known by these names, of course, do not exist, except in some fanciful listings.

Invented names like North Beach, Upper Beach, Upper West Annex, North Bloor West Village, North East York, and South Leaside are designed to give homes the cachet of their trendier and more expensive neighbours.

"It's all aspirational," says Pasalis.

Similarly, according to the Toronto Real Estate Board, South Riverdale has expanded and absorbed what everyone calls Leslieville, which seems to have disappeared.

Even when the authorities agree on the neighbourhoods, not everyone agrees on their names. The City and TREB, for example, call the east waterfront The Beaches, while the locals call it The Beach. Forest Hill North and Forest Hill South are used instead of the local usage of Upper Village and Lower Village.

Maybe it's time for a stakeholder consultation group to agree on standardizing the names for the areas and boundaries of all Toronto neighbourhoods. Right now, it's just too confusing.

Bob Aaron is a Toronto real estate lawyer. www.aaron.ca ©Aaron & Aaron. All Rights Reserved.