

Mayor talks tolerance of civil servants at Summit

By JAN DEAN
Staff

Calgary's Mayor Naheed Nenshi told the 400-plus residents who turned out last night for the Mississauga Summit community launch that we all want the same kind of city.

We want neighbourhoods where we can work and live and play safely. Where our children can walk to school.

So, he asked the gathering at the University of Toronto Mississauga, how come we don't build cities like that?

Nenshi said there's a cavernous gap between what we say we want and what we do. He cited the East Village in Calgary, a neighbourhood located behind his office that had been a political hot potato for 40 years. Derelict and physically isolated, the area was home to a few seniors' buildings and a lone gas station where they sold tons of tire gauges because they can easily be converted into crack pipes.

His predecessor in the mayor's office borrowed \$200 million to pay for rebuilding the local infrastructure and to revitalize the village. Taxes generated through that revitalization process were used to pay off the loan.

The result has been spectacular, Nenshi

said. Most of the land in the East Village has been sold and is being developed. One of the developers is Mississauga's own FRAM Group.

What was once a dangerous place to hang out has been transformed into a highly desirable area, the site of Calgary's new Central Library.

"Look at Mississauga, (with the) Waterfront Development plan, Sheridan College," said Nenshi. "Give people the tools to make change, and they will."

Change comes from entrepreneurship in the private sector, Nenshi said, but if we're serious about wanting different kinds of cities, "we must value innovative, creative civil servants. We need to be forgiving if civil servants fail."

An aversion to risk among civil servants causes City Hall to block innovation, Nenshi said.

"In Calgary, they blocked (a developer) from building the kind of community (Garrison Woods) we all want on a Canadian Forces Base

that had been shut down," Nenshi said. "It took seven years to get all the permits needed to build it, but now the same city that blocked the development for years boasts about its innovation and livability."

When an ice cream entrepreneur in Calgary wanted to set up a food truck business, it was expected to take more than a year to clear the regulatory hurdles. The City had no framework for it, but tapping into Nenshi's own "cut the red tape" initiative, they realized that food trucks need only to pass health and fire inspections and then agree to pay for parking to begin operations.

"Within 20 days we had seven food truck businesses operating," said Nenshi. "And the wait lines at lunchtime for those trucks is an

hour long."

That's an example of civil servants being facilitators rather than regulators, he said.

The night's first guest speaker was Dr. David A. Wolfe, a professor of political science at UTM. He spoke about civic governance.

Nenshi echoed Wolfe's views when he told the crowd that cities are the economic engines of the country. To be globally successful, and to be happy living in our cities, we need to rethink how we build them, govern them, and connect with them.



Naheed Nenshi

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