

Google SMART CITY found to simply be a domestic surveillance program

Ann Cavoukian, former Ontario privacy commissioner, resigns from Sidewalk Labs



By Sean O'Shea

Consumer Reporter Global News



Ontario's former Privacy Commissioner Ann Cavoukian speaking at the University of Ottawa around noon. (August 16, 2010)

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[Ontario's former privacy commissioner](#) has resigned from her consulting role at a company that is preparing to build a high-tech community at Toronto's waterfront, citing concerns that a privacy framework she developed is being overlooked.

Ann Cavoukian resigned from her role from Google sister company Sidewalk Labs on Friday to "make a strong statement" she told Global News.

“I felt I had no choice because I had been told by Sidewalk Labs that all of the data collected will be de-identified at source,” she said.

But last Thursday, at a meeting, she said she found out that wasn't the case with the company, which invested \$40 million to develop technology for a downtown Toronto smart city project.

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“Sidewalk said while they would commit to doing it, the other parties involved in these new entities they've created...they couldn't make them do it,” she said.

Last October, Waterfront Toronto announced it had chosen Sidewalk Labs to present a plan to design a high-tech neighbourhood for the Quayside development, which is along Toronto's eastern waterfront.

Since then, the proposed project has been mired in controversy.

Former Blackberry co-CEO Jim Balsillie called the project “a colonizing experiment in surveillance capitalism.”

READ MORE: [Proposed Toronto development from Google's Sidewalk Labs sparks concerns over data](#)

Cavoukian is one of Canada's foremost privacy experts and a proponent for ensuring the privacy rights of citizens.

"Your personal information, your privacy is critical. It is not just a fundamental human right. It forms the foundation of our freedom," Cavoukian said.


At the meeting with Sidewalk Labs, Cavoukian said she realized she could no longer continue as a consultant with the project after hearing that third parties might have access to identifiable data collected in the proposed project. At that point, she balked.

"When I heard that, I said 'I'm sorry. I can't support this. I have to resign because you committed to embedding privacy by design into every aspect of your operation,'" she said.

Sidewalk Labs released a statement that said it would play "a more limited role" in discussions about data governance, and that while it agrees to follow her framework, Sidewalk Labs cannot guarantee that other companies involved in the project would do so as well.

READ MORE: [Google's Sidewalk Labs project in Toronto raises privacy, data concerns](#)

Cavoukian said she has since approached Waterfront Toronto directly and is hopeful that the body will insist that data collected is immediately de-identified, drastically lowering the possibility that it could be used without someone's consent.



“We don’t want people worrying about where they’re coming and going. We certainly don’t want a city of surveillance. That’s not on.”

— *With files from Canadian Press*