

February 18, 2009

Re: Bloor/Dundas Avenue Study

Dear Gord Perks and Corwin Cambray,

This letter is my response to the work done to date by your consultants, BMI/Pace on the Bloor Dundas 'Avenue' Study. I have attended the last two public meetings, and have become increasingly aware that Precinct 4, the Loblaws/Zellers lands, needed to be discussed and studied carefully in concert with the residents of Herman, Ritchie, Silver and Golden Avenues due to the proximity of that parcel of land to their neighbourhood and the potential impact that any future development would have.

I have a concern about the process that has taken place with regard to community input. I came into the study process late, initially unaware that the study included the Loblaws/Zellers lands and subsequently unable to attend the meetings held in the summer. At the two most recent meetings that I attended, the process at the meetings allowed for individual comments but did not allow for any gathering of consensus on the issues. When I explained that my concerns about the 'Built Form Demonstration Plans' was shared by many of my neighbours, your consultant implied that I needed to prove this was the case. That was when Peter and I decided to call a meeting at our house to discuss the study with the residents of Herman, Ritchie, Golden and Silver Avenues, many of whom were not aware of the study. We distributed 150 flyers, 50 households attended the meeting and we gathered more than 50 email addresses for future communication. We have now formed a community group and a website for the purpose of information dissemination, discussion and efficient mobilization on issues currently impacting our neighbourhood.

I have studied the 'Key Community Directions' and the 'Key Recommendations' for Precinct 4 carefully and while I am in support of the majority of the content, there are some key issues that have raised some concern.

STREETSCAPE/OPEN SPACE

1. The site should have a central public green space as a focal point, & may include recreational activities.

While I support green space on the site, there was an excellent recommendation made at our neighbourhood meeting. The green space would be more accessible to all if located at the south border of the site. There, it would act as both a buffer for the existing houses and as a community park that connects the new neighbourhood to the existing neighbourhood. This space would also help minimize the impact of any new development on the houses on Herman and Ritchie Avenue. In both 'Built Form Demonstration Plans', the green spaces are either fractured and small or located on the northern and eastern areas of the site. What percentage of the 'Open Space' proposed in either Built Form Plan is actually City park land, e.g. public, not private property? What type of park? By amalgamating those spaces into something more substantial, they would provide flexible and useable recreational space for both communities.

BUILT FORM

4. On the Loblaws site, built form should create a transition to the residential neighbourhood to the south with a low-rise built form.”

While I support this statement, both ‘Built Form Demonstration Plans’ propose predominantly 4 storey buildings abutting the existing neighbourhood which is double the height of the houses on Herman and Ritchie. The consultants have defined low-rise in their study as 1 - 3 storeys and so I propose that any buildings abutting the existing neighbourhoods should be as stated—3 storeys, not 4—which would be a respectful transition as stated in the City of Toronto’s Official Plan.

5. Taller buildings (described as anywhere from 12-20 storeys) could be incorporated in the east portion of the site, & mid rise (5-6 storeys) at the street (See Demonstration Plans on Boards 4 & 5).

I would like to understand why 2.5 and 2.7x density has been proposed on a site that abuts a .6 density neighbourhood. All of the neighbourhoods referenced as development examples (Liberty Village, St. Lawrence Neighbourhood, Robert Watson lofts) are not abutting existing neighbourhoods.

Mid rise buildings are appropriate for this site, taller buildings are not. The site is not large enough (due to shading issues on the north and east borders of the site and privacy and transition issues on the east and south borders of the site. Residents of taller buildings do not integrate with communities in lower density neighbourhoods, as proven by the Crossways development at Bloor and Dundas and most other towers that hover above lower density neighbourhoods throughout the city. They create wind problems (the Crossways) and privacy issues. Mid rise buildings (up to 8 storeys) would be acceptable in the north half of the site. Key to the integration of mid rise buildings into neighbourhoods are multiple entrances directly onto the street, rather than central lobby entrances. A ‘Key Community Direction’ was to—“Ensure that taller buildings are located to minimize impact”. In both Built Form Demonstration Plans there are inappropriately tall buildings placed at the south east corner of the site (10 and 20 storeys) that would negatively impact the privacy of the houses at the northeast end of Ritchie Avenue.

In addition:

Both ‘Built Form Demonstration Plans’ show Ritchie and Herman Avenues connecting with streets in the new neighbourhood. Ritchie and Herman have enjoyed both the luxuries and the inconveniences that dead end streets provide for many years. The conditions of dead end streets create a sense of community, increase our children’s safety and allow for a slower pace of life. Additionally, the streets are not wide enough to accommodate two way traffic if connected. The draft study and the Build Form Plans have succeeded in raising many questions about traffic flow and street connections. An increased population of 1,500 to 2,000 people working and living directly to the north of Ritchie and Herman may contribute upwards of 600 vehicles, with a modest estimate of 250 – 300 vehicles entering and exiting the site daily (not including retail traffic to the future Loblaws on site), which would have a very negative impact on these quiet streets, far exceeding the traffic

on other similar neighbourhood streets in the High Park area. At what point in this process does the planning become specific enough to address this issue? Who develops the street plan for a property of this type, the City or the developer? What are the precedents? According to the Official Plan, a Mixed-Use Area will 'create a balance of high-quality commercial, residential, institutional and open spaces that reduce automobile dependency and meet the needs of the local community. Will connecting the new streets to Ritchie and Herman Avenues indeed reduce automobile dependency or encourage it? Is there a way to limit the connection of these streets to pedestrians, bicycles, emergency and city vehicles? Are there other entrance/exits to the site possible, e.g. two entrances off Dundas Street, and entrance from Bloor Street. While I can see how the connection will enhance traffic circulation in the new neighbourhood, I can see no benefit to the residents of Herman and Ritchie.

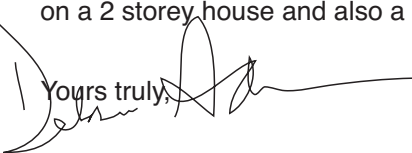
As a neighbourhood, we need to understand the 'Next Steps':

It is becoming clear that Zoning Bylaws alone cannot define this site enough to protect and respect the existing neighbourhood. Gord, you mentioned in our telephone conversation that additional Urban Design Guidelines and/or Official Plan Amendments might make to ensure that future development on the site has our best interest at heart. I would like to have a conversation with you regarding this as I don't completely understand the differences or the implications and we ran out of time last evening.

There are a lot of good ideas that have come forward with this study that will enhance the quality of urban experience in the area (green spaces and trees, sustainable building practices, community services and facilities, a mix of retail/ residential buildings and mixed and affordable residential, medium and low density buildings). How do we entrench these ideas in this process so that they don't end up as developer's bargaining tools for increased density?

I have included a rudimentary alternative Built Form Demonstration Plan that demonstrates the ideas I have mentioned—the green 'buffer' zone, redistribution of building density/locations that would be more respectful to the existing neighbourhood and traffic flow. It also takes a look at knitting the two opposing grids of Dundas and the Ritchie, Herman, Golden, Silver Streets together in a manner that rotates the taller buildings 45 degrees at the north or the site, cutting down on shading impacts on the school and playing field.

I appreciate meeting with you and our neighbours at the High Park Library last evening in order to gain a better understanding of this process. We appreciate the opportunity you have created to hear our concerns. I look forward to receiving and distributing the images Corwin is creating to demonstrate the impact of a 4 storey building on a 2 storey house and also a new Built Form Demonstration Plan he agreed to provide.

Yours truly,


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