

Clause embodied in Report No. 2 of the Planning and Transportation Committee, as adopted by the Council of the City of Toronto at its regular meeting held on February 4, 5 and 6, 2003.

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Criteria and Process for Selecting Priority Avenue Studies

(City Council at its regular meeting held on February 4, 5 and 6, 2003, amended this Clause by amending Recommendation No. (2) embodied in the report dated January 6, 2003, from the Commissioner of Urban Development Services, to provide that economic development programs and initiatives be factors in identifying Avenue studies.)

The Planning and Transportation Committee recommends the adoption of the report (January 6, 2003) from the Commissioner of Urban Development Services:

Purpose:

This report discusses criteria that can be used to select priorities for Avenue studies and outlines a selection process based on those criteria.

Financial Implications and Impact Statement:

There are no financial implications arising from this report.

Recommendations:

It is recommended that:

- (1) Council endorse the criteria set out in this report as the basis for evaluating which Avenues should be studied on a priority basis; and
- (2) the Commissioner of Urban Development Services evaluate Avenues with the greatest potential on the basis of the criteria outlined in this report, and report back to Community Councils and Planning and Transportation Committee on recommended Avenues for studies. This further report will outline available resources for immediate Avenue studies, establish the number of Avenue studies that can be carried out concurrently, and present options for Community Councils to select their priority or priorities.

Background:

The new Official Plan, adopted by Council in November, 2002, identified selected corridors along major streets as 'Avenues' where transit-supportive reurbanization can create new jobs and housing while improving local streetscapes, infrastructure and amenities. Because the context of the Avenues varies greatly, Section 2.2.3 of the new Official Plan provides that the framework

for the reurbanization of each Avenue will be achieved through the preparation of Avenue studies for strategic mixed use segments of each Avenue. Each Avenue study will be prepared in consultation with local residents, businesses, the TTC and other local stakeholders to set out investments that may be needed to make the area attractive for residents and businesses, and to create as-of-right zoning and other regulations that form a framework for incremental and gradual redevelopment on the Avenue segment.

The Planning and Transportation Committee, at its meeting of September 24, 2002 requested that the Commissioner of Urban Development Services report to Committee on criteria for Avenue Studies. City Council, at their meeting of October 29, 30 and 31 requested the Commissioner of Urban Development Services to 'submit a report to the Planning and Transportation Committee on designating and undertaking the following for priority Avenue studies: College Street; a subway-related street (eg. Danforth Avenue); and, an arterial road (eg. Finch Avenue or Lakeshore Boulevard West)'.

Both the requests of Planning and Transportation Committee and Council are addressed in this report.

Comments:

(1) Four Pilot Avenue Studies are Nearing Completion

As part of the preparation of the new Official Plan, four pilot Avenue studies were undertaken in consultation with communities and Councillors for the following Avenue segments: Bloor Street between Lansdowne Avenue and Dundas Street West, Finch Avenue in the vicinity of Weston Road, Kingston Road between the Guildwood GO Station and Highland Creek, and the Queensway, between Mimico Creek and Kipling Avenue. The 'concept plan' for each of these study areas was forwarded to Planning and Transportation Committee in June, 2001. The implementation plan containing zoning by-laws and recommended area improvements for the Bloor Street study have been forwarded to Humber York Community Council, with the implementation plans for the other study areas to follow early in 2003. The lessons learned in these pilot studies have contributed to the 'Avenue' policies of the new Official Plan and will inform the selection and content of future Avenue studies. Some of the key lessons learned from the four pilot studies that are not discussed in other portions of this report are:

- segments of Avenues to be studied should generally be smaller than the 3 km of the Queensway and Kingston Road;
- a traditional zoning approach of maximum densities, heights and angular planes is preferable to a design based zoning with no densities;
- Avenue studies need to identify streetscape and community improvements and how they can be implemented;
- improvements in the road rights-of-way need to be co-ordinated with the road reconstruction schedule;
- parking requirements in some former municipalities are high, even along transit priority corridors, and need to be reviewed;
- some Avenues require concerted marketing efforts to make the public aware of their potential; and
- pedestrian realm and streetscape improvements are paramount to local communities.

The experience of the pilot studies has also indicated that dedicated staff resources are required for the Avenue studies. The pilot studies have fulfilled the request of Planning and Transportation Committee for Avenue studies on an arterial road, and the Bloor Street Avenue study addresses reurbanization on an Avenue segment that contains two subway stations.

(2) Criteria for the Selection of Avenue Segments for Avenue Studies

The Avenues shown on Map 2 of the new Official Plan extend over approximately 160 km. of arterial roadways. Just as the build-out of each Avenue will be incremental, so too will the study of Toronto's Avenues. Staff resources do not permit immediate and concurrent studies of all of the Avenues with reurbanization potential. However, through the process of demarcating the Avenues and undertaking pilot studies, criteria for setting priorities for Avenue studies have been identified. When evaluating segments of Avenues for study, priority should be given to those that meet a large number of the following criteria, although it is rare that an Avenue segment would meet them all.

a) Presence of Vacant and Underutilized Lands with Redevelopment Potential

Avenues that are characterized by one or two storey commercial buildings, vacant and underutilized lands and large areas of surface parking have the greatest need for transformation and often contain larger sites that lend themselves to redevelopment without the need for complex land assembly.

b) Creation of New Jobs and Housing along Transit Lines

One of the key policies of the new Official Plan is to direct growth in jobs and housing to areas well-served by surface transit and transit stations. Priority should be given to the study of Avenues that are served by rapid transit stations, GO stations, and transit priority segments shown on Map 4 of the Official Plan where transit services in exclusive rights of way are to be created as funding becomes available.

c) Existing Zoning an Impediment to Area Improvement and Growth

There are Avenues that have developed for low-scale automobile-oriented commercial development because that is all the existing zoning permits. In the Avenue pilot for Kingston Road, for example, the 'highway commercial' plan designation and zoning was seen to contribute to the dominance of auto-oriented commercial uses, as proposals for residential redevelopment bear the additional costs and time delays associated with rezoning applications. In areas where the zoning by-law is restricted to commercial uses there is a need to introduce a mixed commercial-residential zoning regime that includes regulations for densities, heights, scale transitions to adjacent areas and other site standards that have been developed in consultation with the community.

There are many 'main street' Avenues, particularly in the former City of York and City of Toronto where the existing zoning permits mixed commercial-residential development within a regime of heights, densities and scale transitions that have been developed with extensive community consultation. As the current zoning provides a framework for reurbanization, and

community improvements have often already been identified, these Avenue segments would be a low priority for further study, unless recent developments have considerably exceeded the current zoning provisions.

d) Need for Streetscape and Pedestrian Improvements and Scheduling of Road Reconstruction

Some of the Avenues have had few investments in landscaping, plantings, street furniture and other pedestrian amenities, while others have benefitted from substantial public realm improvements through civic and provincial capital programmes, BIA investments and private redevelopment. In all of our pilot studies the community participants made the creation of an attractive streetscape and pedestrian realm a priority for their area. A need for streetscape and pedestrian improvements should be a criterion in evaluating priorities for Avenue studies.

The timing of proposed right-of-way reconstruction is another factor to be considered. Trees should be planted and sidewalks widened when the right-of-way is scheduled for reconstruction in order to minimize the cost of improvements. If an Avenue segment is scheduled for reconstruction in the next few years, it would be considered more of a priority so that public improvements could be co-ordinated with the reconstruction of the right-of-way. Streetscape improvements identified in Avenue studies undertaken after recent road reconstruction would be more expensive and difficult to implement.

e) Market Conditions Exist for Redevelopment

Regardless of the zoning permissions, there are areas where obstacles may preclude the reurbanization of an Avenue. For example, there are Avenues where there is little redevelopment potential because lot sizes are small and ownership is fragmented. If the Avenue is successful, high property values would make consolidation of reasonable development sites difficult. Even in areas where property values are low, site consolidation of small properties often requires considerable time and patience.

There are also Avenues with market conditions favourable to redevelopment where development pressure is altering the local character, but there is no unifying framework for the scale, form and character of new development. Each proponent of a development may be looking no further than their own property line and there is no co-ordination of how the street will look. These Avenue segments should be a priority for study as they are prime candidates for growth and need a development framework in the short-term to ensure that new buildings and spaces work together to create an attractive and comfortable environment.

f) Physical Infrastructure Can Accommodate Additional Growth

An important goal of the new Official Plan is to direct growth to areas where municipal infrastructure and services could be used more efficiently. Sewer and water capacity should be available or be capable of being economically expanded to accommodate additional development in priority Avenue segments.

Road capacity is a more complex issue. In four of our pilot Avenue studies the roads were very busy with much of their capacity being taken up by through traffic, largely originating from beyond the City's boundaries. However, an apparent lack of road capacity should not necessarily be interpreted as imposing a constraint on the potential of a given area to develop as an Avenue. Indeed, in this context, the challenge is to better use the capacity of the street to support local development objectives. As the Official Plan policies indicate, the key to meeting this challenge is through reducing auto dependency by improving transit services and encouraging patterns of land use development that result in shorter trips and environmentally friendly modes of travel, such as walking and cycling. In this way, Avenues are themselves a part of the long-run solution to the land use/transportation balance.

g) Community Support for an Avenue Study

Community support for an Avenue study is difficult to gauge at an initial evaluation stage as public consultations normally only begin with the Avenue Study. There may be requests from business or residents associations but the extent of support for an Avenue study is often only evident once public meetings and charettes are taking place or when draft recommendations are brought forward. Requests from communities for a study of an Avenue segment should be considered as a positive indication of local interest and potential participation.

h) Geographic Distribution

Avenue segments selected for study should have a broad geographical distribution across the City. But there is no need to have the same number of studies going forward in each community council or service district. In the former City of Toronto and City of York, it was difficult to find an Avenue segment for the pilot study that met most of the criteria. On the other hand, there were many candidates in the former cities of Scarborough and North York. Over time, every Avenue segment that does not already have a mixed use zoning regime with densities and heights implemented through community consultation will be studied if Council deems it so.

i) Studies Have Been Done But Not Implemented

There are Avenues where the former municipalities carried out studies in consultation with the local community that established the desirable mix of uses, the scale and density of development, and needed streetscape and public realm improvements. For some reason, these studies were never implemented through the adoption of new zoning standards and adopted design guidelines. An example is an excellent 1997 study of Kingston Road between Brimley Road and the Guildwood GO station. Where these Avenue studies were substantially completed, it should be a priority to re-engage the community participants and complete the implementation of the study.

(3) A Process for Selecting Priority Avenue Segments to be Studied

The selection of segments of Avenues to be studied as a priority should rest with Council. However, it is difficult for Council to examine all of the candidates in light of criteria set out in this report, and others that may be added by Committee. I am therefore recommending that the Commissioner of Urban Development Services prepare a further report to be distributed to all Community Councils and Planning and Transportation Committee evaluating a number of

potential Avenue studies against the criteria set out in this report. The report would also outline the staff resources to be deployed in carrying out the Avenue studies and the number of studies that could be undertaken simultaneously. The actual selection of the priority Avenue segments to be studied would be left for Community Councils.

Conclusions:

The undertaking of Avenue studies is a major tool in implementing the growth strategy of the new Official Plan. This report outlines criteria for the selection of which Avenues should be studied as a priority, as well as proposing a process for selecting Avenue segments for priority study based on the criteria.

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