



**STAFF REPORT  
ACTION REQUIRED**

**Urbanizing the Avenues  
Mid-Rise Buildings Symposium Update and  
Avenue Studies Next Steps**

<b>Date:</b>	March 14, 2007
<b>To:</b>	Planning and Growth Management Committee
<b>From:</b>	Chief Planner and Executive Director, City Planning Division
<b>Wards:</b>	All
<b>Reference Number:</b>	pg070018

**SUMMARY**

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The Mid-Rise Buildings Symposium and the Avenue Studies carried out by the City have been important steps towards the implementation of the Official Plan’s goals and objectives to intensify the Avenues.

The purpose of this report is to update members of City Council on the findings of the Mid-Rise Buildings Symposium as well as the recent Avenue Studies and to recommend appropriate next steps.

Next Steps will include consultation with other City Divisions to review the issues and obstacles raised, and seek viable solutions in order to promote the development of mid-rise buildings on the Avenues.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

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**The City Planning Division recommends that Council:**

1. Direct the Chief Planner and Executive Director, City Planning to establish a

- Mid-Rise Buildings Interdivisional Team to investigate methods to reduce obstacles and promote the development of mid-rise buildings.
2. Direct staff to report back to the Planning and Growth Management Committee by March 2008 on the progress of a Mid-Rise Buildings Action Plan.

### **Implementation Points**

The implementation of this report requires that City Planning Staff be allocated to lead a Mid-Rise Building Interdivisional Work Team, and that staff from other City Divisions be requested to participate.

### **Financial Impact**

There are no financial implications resulting from this report.

### **DECISION HISTORY**

On February 4, 5, and 6, 2003, Council adopted a report that identifies criteria and a process for selecting priority Avenue Studies.

Since then Council has made yearly recommendations for specific Avenues to be studied in detail. To date, 14 studies have commenced, and 9 have been completed.

During the 2005 budget process, Council allocated a portion of the Avenue Studies budget for a Symposium to explore opportunities for encouraging more Mid-Rise Buildings within the Avenue designations.

A complete list of Avenue Studies completed and underway are listed in Attachment 1.

### **ISSUE BACKGROUND**

On July 6, 2006, the Ontario Municipal Board issued Order No. 1928 bringing the majority of the new Official Plan into force and effect, with the exception of Policies 4.2.3(c), 3.2.1.5(b), 3.2.1.9, 3.4.5 and 3.4.11(b). Policies in the former Official Plan and Metro Plan respecting these policy areas remain in effect.

Policy 2.2.3 of the Official Plan identifies Toronto's main commercial streets, or 'Avenues' as appropriate locations where reurbanization can occur to create new housing and jobs, generally in the form of mid-rise, mixed-use buildings. In addition to the Downtown and the Centres, the Avenues are the areas that are intended to accommodate growth for new housing, retail, community facilities and improved public transportation - all in a form that is compatible with adjacent neighbourhoods.

The Avenues policies not only encourage residential intensification but also encourage mixed use buildings and office/commercial buildings.

The Urban Structure Map, Map 2 in the Official Plan which illustrates the Avenues Designation generally corresponds with Map 4, which shows the Higher Order Transit Corridors. The intended result will be more people living and working within walking distance of the public transit system. This will in turn promote the Green Development Standards recently adopted by City Council.

The Official Plan provides a framework for the reurbanization of each Avenue through the preparation of Avenue Studies.

## **The Avenues and the Avenue Studies**

Avenue Studies are intended to promote the objectives of the Official Plan by creating a framework for change which is specifically tailored to the local area. They generally contain a vision and an implementation plan which illustrates redevelopment potential and public realm improvements.

In addition, the Avenue Studies facilitate growth by engaging local residents, businesses, the TTC and other local stakeholders in order to set out contextually appropriate as-of-right zoning and other regulations designed to achieve high quality development along the Avenues.

Toronto's development community's full support of this policy is vital to the intensification of the Avenues, and the amount and timing of development will vary according to market conditions.

To date, 14 studies have been undertaken in consultation with the adjacent communities and Councillors, 9 of which are complete (see Attachment 1). However, relatively few mid-rise buildings have been constructed.

## **Mid-Rise Buildings**

The Avenue Studies have generally resulted in recommendations for a range of zoning permissions for uses, parking standards, heights, and setbacks. Specifically, By-law Amendment recommendations for each of the completed Avenue Studies to date have supported a mid-rise form of building as part of the intensification strategy.

The mid-rise building form can be accommodated within the existing lot depths, and can appropriately make a transition to fit within a mature neighbourhood context, where existing buildings are often one and two storeys.

Mid-rise buildings generally range in height from 4 to 12 storeys. They are described as

buildings that are taller than a typical house or townhouse but no taller than the street right-of-way. For example, on a street with a 24 metre right-of-way, a mid-rise building could rise to a height of 8 storeys, or 24 metres in height. This type of building may also appropriately be located on streets other than designated Avenues.

Due to a number of factors such as fragmented lot ownership, marketing challenges and construction costs, Toronto's local development community has not typically embraced this building form, preferring either tall buildings or townhouses.

## **Mid-Rise Buildings Symposium**

In the budget for the 2005 Avenue Studies, Council allocated a portion of the spending to fund a symposium to explore opportunities for encouraging more mid-rise buildings within the Avenue designations. This funding, in partnership with the Canadian Urban Institute (CUI) and the Toronto Society of Architects (TSA), allowed City Planning Staff to hold the public Symposium on November 28 and 29, 2005, entitled "Mid-Rise Buildings - Urbanizing the Avenues".

The three-part Symposium featured speakers and panellists from Toronto, Vancouver, and Boston, with opening remarks from Mayor David Miller. Area Councillors, the public and the local development industry were invited to attend the symposium. Notice of the event was posted in a major newspaper and on public websites. In addition, notice to specific stakeholders was given through professional and industry bulletins and publications.

The symposium was well attended. The morning session attracted upwards of 300 participants representing a wide cross-section of Toronto's community, including developers, academics, planners, architects, economists, engineers, professional organizations, community stakeholders, and students. The afternoon workshop sessions were also well attended, as was the evening event.

The symposium demonstrated the community's interest in this issue and the need to provide encouragement, certainty and incentives to the development community and educational materials for both professionals and for the communities living along or adjacent to the Avenues.

Public interest in mid-rise buildings has also been demonstrated throughout the Avenue Studies which have been carried out to date, most of which recommend this type of development for the areas which were studied.

A complete and detailed summary of the event, including copies of the presentations given, can be found at [www.toronto.ca/planning/midrise\\_symposium.htm](http://www.toronto.ca/planning/midrise_symposium.htm). A selection of symposium presentations, workshop summaries and background information has been posted on this site for information and consideration.

## **Summary of Symposium Findings**

A wide range of ideas and suggestions were put forward by presenters and the audience throughout the Symposium. A Summary of Key Suggestions from the discussions at the event is attached. (Attachment 2). This list will form a starting point for the consultation with the appropriate City Divisions aimed at promoting the development of more mid-rise buildings in Toronto.

## **COMMENTS**

### **Overview of Lessons Learned: Issues and Obstacles**

The mid-rise building form can suitably accommodate intensification along the Avenues. However, relatively few have been constructed.

Reasons for this may include the high cost of land assembly, construction costs, and market demands. Through the Mid-Rise Building Symposium, a myriad of real and perceived obstacles have surfaced. For example, parking requirements, water connection fees, loading and garbage requirements, Ontario Building Code requirements, NIMBYism, and a lengthy approvals process were all cited as contributing deterrents. In order to effectively promote the type of city building envisioned in the Official Plan, all City Divisions should examine impediments and eliminate or minimize the barriers for mid-rise development.

### **Need for Action: Immediate and Long Range Solutions**

Suggestions from the Symposium range from small and practical, such as establishing a Mid-Rise Building category for the Toronto Urban Design Awards, to the very large and complex, such as reviewing the Ontario Building Code as it pertains to these buildings. Most suggestions are worthy of further examination.

In general terms, the suggested solutions for encouraging mid-rise buildings in Toronto fell into three broad categories:

- reviewing the City and Provincial requirements;
- educating the public and development industry; and
- promoting the findings.

Staff have reviewed the findings of the symposium and found that in all three broad categories, there were immediate actions which could be taken, and longer-term solutions which require further study.

## Immediate Actions

Immediate action has already been taken on some of the findings of the Mid-Rise Buildings Symposium:

- An award category for the 2007 Toronto Urban Design Awards (TUDA) has been created for a “Building in Context: Mid-Rise Building in Context” to raise awareness and promote pride in successful mid-rise buildings which exist to date.
- As part of the comprehensive Zoning By-Law Harmonization project, parking standards are being reviewed with the view to harmonized and equitable standards city-wide. Reduced requirements are under consideration within the Avenue designations.
- The Mid-Rise web page ([http://www.toronto.ca/planning/midrise\\_symposium.htm](http://www.toronto.ca/planning/midrise_symposium.htm)) continues to act as an information resource, with contacts and feedback for both staff and the development industry.
- The Precedents and Case Studies research which staff prepared as background to the symposium is being updated on a regular basis.
- City Planning Policy Staff have commenced a study entitled “Retailing on the Avenues”, which is intended to address basic questions around the role of retail in redevelopment on the Avenues. The results of this study will inform some of the longer-term issues facing the retail component of mid-rise buildings.
- The Streetscape Manual is being updated with input from other City Divisions, most notably Transportation Services and Urban Forestry. When complete, this Manual will be made available to staff and members of the development industry and will be used in conjunction with Technical Services Specifications for construction within the road allowance. This will assist developers in providing certainty and predictability with respect to the streetscape portions of mid-rise developments.
- The 2005 and 2006 Avenue Studies are underway (see Attachment 1). The work program has been adjusted to incorporate some of the findings from the symposium, such suggestions regarding an improved community consultation process and information sharing using Avenue Study web sites.

## Long Range Steps

In order to move ahead with a City-wide strategy for encouraging and facilitating mid-

rise buildings on the Avenues, a strategic and co-ordinated plan is necessary, and longer term solutions need to be examined. This work will fall primarily to City Planning Division staff to lead. However, staff from various other City Divisions and Agencies will be requested to participate.

It is recommended that staff consult with other relevant City Divisions to investigate how to advance the results of the Symposium. This may involve the formation of a Steering Committee, an Interdivisional Work Team, and an Industry Reference Group.

The purpose of these groups will be to make recommendations on a Mid-Rise Buildings Action Plan to Council.

The consultation process will include the appropriate sections within:

- City Manager's Office
- Citizen Focused Services A  
Deputy City Manager Sue Corke
- Citizen Focused Services B  
Deputy City Manager Richard Butts
- Internal Focused Services  
Deputy City Manager & Chief Financial Officer, Joseph Pennachetti:
- Other Boards and Agencies such as the TTC, and Utilities

## **Work Program**

A three phase project is recommended:

Phase One:

- The adoption of this report will give direction to consult with various City Divisions.

Phase Two:

- Consultation and formation of work groups.

Phase Three:

- Progress report regarding a Mid-Rise Buildings Action Plan, financial and staffing implications, and an on-going implementation strategy.

## **Impact on Other Programs**

The implementation of this report will require the co-operation and participation of various City Divisions. Financial and staffing implications will be reported on in detail in the progress report.

## Timelines

It is anticipated that staff will report back on interim progress to the Planning and Growth Management Committee by March 2008.

## CONCLUSIONS

The Mid-Rise Buildings Symposium and the Avenue Studies have been important steps towards the implementation of Toronto Official Plan's goals and objectives.

It is recommended that City Council endorse this report to ensure that all relevant City Divisions may be consulted in the development of a Mid-Rise Building Action Plan to promote growth and reurbanization along the Avenues as set out in the Official Plan.

## CONTACT

Gary Wright  
Director, Community Planning  
Toronto & East York  
Tel: 416-392-0427

Robert J. Freedman  
Director, Urban Design  
Tel: 416-392-1126  
Fax: 416-392-1744

Fax: 416-392-1330  
Email: [gwright1@toronto.ca](mailto:gwright1@toronto.ca)

Email: [rfreedm@toronto.ca](mailto:rfreedm@toronto.ca)

Lorna Day  
Program Manager, Urban Design  
Tel: 416-394-6008  
Fax: 416-394-6063  
Email: [lday@toronto.ca](mailto:lday@toronto.ca)

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Ted Tyndorf, Chief Planner and Executive Director  
City Planning Division

## ATTACHMENTS

Attachment 1: List of Avenue Studies  
Attachment 2: Mid-Rise Building Symposium Summary of Key Suggestions



**Attachment 1: List of Avenue Studies and Segment Studies**  
**March 2007**

Pilot Studies:

1. Bloor Street between Lansdowne Avenue and Dundas Street West;
2. Kingston Road between the Guildwood GO Station and Highland Creek;
3. The Queensway between Mimico Creek and Kipling Avenue; and
4. Finch Avenue in the vicinity of Weston Road.

Reports containing zoning by-laws and recommendations for area improvements were adopted by Council in 2003 for these areas.

Studies approved for 2003:

5. College Street between Spadina and Ossington,
6. Lake Shore Boulevard West between Fleeceline Road and the Etobicoke Creek (later refined to the area from Kipling Avenue to the Etobicoke Creek), and
7. Wilson Avenue between Bathurst and Keele Streets.

Consultant reports on these studies have been completed and reported to Council except for Wilson Avenue which will be reported to Council in the near future. In addition, planning staff reported in 2003 on by-laws to implement a previous design study that had been done for Bloor Street West between Mimico Creek and Prince Edward Drive.

Studies approved for 2004:

8. Danforth Avenue from Victoria Park Avenue to Warden Avenue, and
9. Dundas Street West from Royal York Road to the Humber River.

The Dundas Study is completed, and the Danforth consultant report has been finalized, but not yet reported to Council.

Studies approved for 2005:

10. St. Clair Avenue West from Bathurst Street to Glenholm Avenue,
11. St. Clair Avenue West from Glenholme Avenue to Keele Street, and
12. O'Connor Drive between Sandra Road and Victoria Park Avenue.

These studies commenced in November 2005, and will be reported to Council in 2007

Studies approved for 2006:

13. Lawrence Avenue from Victoria Park Avenue to Birchmount Avenue and
14. Avenue Road from Wilson Avenue to Lawrence Avenue West

These studies are in the early stages and will likely be reported to Council in 2008.

## **Attachment 2: Mid Rise Building Symposium Summary of Key Suggestions**

### **List of Key Suggestions**

The Mid Rise Symposium was an important step towards the implementation of Toronto Official Plan goals and objectives. Symposium participants made a number of suggestions, and staff have tracked and categorized the key suggestions below:

### **Municipal Policy and Research Initiatives**

- Ensure Public Sector leadership: all publicly funded buildings within the Avenues designation should build to minimum densities, such as libraries, schools, daycares, TTC stations, community centres, Toronto Parking Authority, post offices, daycares, police stations etc.
- Speed up Avenue Studies; and revise the Terms of Reference to make studies less streetscape-oriented with more emphasis on pre-zoning.
- Construction costs are the same all across the city. Therefore revenues and profits depend heavily on location. Avenue Studies should address this.
- Prohibit high-rise buildings at locations where the City wants to encourage mid-rise; finish Tall Building studies.
- Create polices to preserve larger sites.
- Identify existing city-owned surplus lands for mid-rise redevelopment opportunities - lead by example.
- Examine partnership and policies to create affordable housing in conjunction with other Public initiatives along the Avenues.
- Review options for Tax Increment Financing on the Avenues, as well as other tax category changes.
- Examine the use of Community Improvement policies.
- Limit severances on properties with wide frontages on designated Avenues.
- Consider auto-share, off-site parking (commercial lots), parking stackers and elevators as potential solutions to satisfying parking requirements.
- Publish the 'Precedents' Research.
- Look at successful international examples of mid-rise intensification in places such as Chicago or London.
- Establish Industry Reference Group involving representatives from development industry, architects, academics, City Staff, BIAs etc.; to generate workshops or presentations to staff, to other municipalities; industry associations etc.

### **Municipal Implementation Tool Kit**

- Provide a comprehensive incentives kit along with a further look at taxation policies; building code requirements; development charges; use of Community Improvement policies; small site parking; and loading exemptions etc. as these pertain to Avenues Mid-Rise development.
- Establish development permit system (DPS) along the Avenues.

- Study small site parking and loading exemptions.
- For smaller developments waive Section 37 requirements; Parkland dedication requirements or payment in lieu; parking requirements; limit or eliminate Development charges for Mid-Rise buildings.
- 'Avenues' zoning parameters should permit: flexible floor to ceilings (more height); No 'shrink wrap' zoning envelopes; minimum as-of-right zoning of 2.5X with simple setbacks.
- Pre-zone areas on periphery Avenues where retail is not so successful that it precludes redevelopment.
- Provide for Mid-Rise "as of right" type base Zoning, as was provided for in the former City of Toronto's MCR zoning provisions.
- Minimum lot depths for Mid Rise Buildings should be 120 feet.
- Generally loosen zoning requirements.
- Put less detail into zoning by-laws and make better use of the flexibility afforded by design guidelines.
- Reduce Parking Requirements.
- Permit parking at ground floor of buildings screened by retail or residential units at-grade from street on larger sites.

### **Municipal Processing Incentives**

- Initiate a special process to direct development and investment along Avenues that could involve a triage of City Departments or "swat team" with pro-active support from the City Manager, Deputies, Mayor and Council.
- Revise the Site Plan Process to delegate approval to staff (no bump up to Council) and permit Planning Staff to 'weigh the benefits' of Works and Emergency Services requirements on these sites.
- Establish an internal Staff Steering Group examine changes to approvals process.
- Ensure all City Departments work together towards a shared vision for mid-rise development and parking and loading standards.
- Provide for certainty and a consistent commitment to work together to resolve issues and remove risk from approvals process.

### **Retail and Live-Work Strategies**

- Exempt ground floor retail from GFA; development charges; parking requirements; and property tax.
- Reduce the difference between ground floor retail taxes in a new building and existing 2-3 storey strip retail buildings.
- Provide transition incentives to retain existing retailers being dislocated by the redevelopment of particular sites.
- Accommodate for the conversion of ground floor space by providing flexible zoning to permit ground floor changes of use.
- Secure Ground Floor Retail leases in advance of final building design to ensure utility.

- Review Residential Condominium Agreements, which preclude a wide range of retail uses.
- Review loading, storage and garbage space requirements as these relate to retail.
- Allow for Retail Signage.
- Further assistance could be given to small businesses in connecting potential retail uses with developers on the Avenues, as well as helping developers with marketing strategies to appeal to younger/older buyers within the established neighbourhoods.
- Recognize Live/Work as retail, and review strict building code restrictions which make it difficult to achieve; (Ontario Building Code requirement limits live/work areas to 150 square metres).
- Create a 'live work' tax category.

### **Community Consultation Enhancements**

- Re-examine the community consultation process. Need for community support is fundamental to making Mid-Rise development work.
- Create a community culture of co-operation rather than confrontation by holding open houses; deal with issues on a one-on-one basis; work with communities to provide benefits.
- Public meetings during the planning stages should also be part of marketing the finished product. (Engage the community who may want to live or run their business in the new building).
- Focus redevelopment efforts on receptive communities and build on success.
- Promote existing and surrounding amenities in the neighbourhoods as a way to advertise mid-rise development.
- Communities need to understand how intensification will affect them; they may need new amenities to enhance their streets and communities, yet these things (such as good shopping, active public realm, and coffee shops) do not come if intensification does not occur.

### **Site-planning and Sustainability Improvements**

- Mandate 'Green Roof' requirements.
- Require more amenity spaces.
- Provide clear streetscape requirements so that developers can incorporate cost estimates into project costs.
- Place all development along the Avenues under Site Plan Control.
- Ensure a diversity of buildings (in terms of cost, unit sizes, style, etc.).
- Assist applicants in the co-ordination of right-of-way issues such as access, hydro, TTC stops, and sidewalk reconstruction.
- Examine the implications for cost sharing some of the public realm improvements on smaller projects.
- Make garbage and loading requirements less onerous.
- Prohibit new curb cuts along Avenues.

- Encourage the participation of local businesses to help change the streetscape of the Avenues.
- Create "Avenues Incentive Corridors" or "Avenues First" policies or "Avenues Enterprise zones" through Community Improvement Plan and the use of tax increment financing.
- Facilitate an OBC Review for mid-rise building category (Limited Combustible); to be addressed by the Ministry of Housing and the Building Code Commission.

### **Prepare Communication and Promotions Strategies**

- Educate & Market the Avenues as a positive lifestyle option; link the Policy Vision to personal daily life.
- Communicate the positive examples of Mid-Rise buildings along our Avenues to the public, politicians, stakeholders and share lessons learned.
- Address the gaps between expectations and reality, by better explaining the options Avenues offer as a life style choice - use the "see, feel, touch" approach.
- Consistently reinforce the message that intensification shouldn't be feared and that the best way to get good street life, animation, retail and servicing variety and other amenities is through intensification.
- Help with a "perceptual shift" - engage the development industry, land-owners in a discussion that focuses around dispelling the notion that intensification means high-rise and hold-outs for "unrealistic" land values expectations along Avenues.
- Establish a new award through AUDA - "Building in Context" for Mid-Rise Buildings.
- Send out occasional media releases announcing mid-rise building activity or some other "good news" stories.
- Maintain ongoing Web presence.

### **Other 'Big Picture' Suggestions**

- Expand the transit system, particularly subways.
- Can the City help secure mortgages? Banks are part of the problem - especially around assisting with affordable housing units.
- Can City help with Partnerships such as Seniors Housing providers?
- Lead by example - City needs to set the stage and invest in public realm improvements.
- Subways and streetcars make vibrations and noise along the streets; Need to make subways and streetcars are less noisy and smoother along the Avenues to overcome this issue.
- Understand the collective and cumulative impacts of charges before proposing incentives.