

Update on the Avenues and Mid-Rise Buildings Action Plan

Date:	May 15, 2009
To:	Planning and Growth Management Committee
From:	Chief Planner and Executive Director, City Planning Division
Wards:	All
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SUMMARY

The purpose of this report is to update the members of the Planning and Growth Management Committee on the progress of the Mid-Rise Buildings Action Plan and to initiate the public consultation process.

The two primary components of the Action Plan are:

- Staff consultation with the Mid-Rise Buildings Interdivisional Team, currently being undertaken by City Planning; and
- the Avenues and Mid-Rise Buildings Study currently being undertaken by the consultant team of Brook McIlroy Planning + Urban Design/Pace Architects together with Quadrangle Architects. The Executive Summary, draft Mid-Rise Buildings Performance Standards and a summary of completed Avenue Studies from this study is attached.

Public consultation will form an essential part of the Avenues and Mid-Rise Buildings Study. Planning Staff recognize the importance of providing the public with meaningful opportunities to learn about the Study, ask questions and provide comment and will be hosting City-wide consultation sessions once the full Consultant Study is complete and available on the internet by the late summer, 2009.

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 identified criteria and a process for selecting priority Avenue Studies.

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.

On April 23 and 24, 2007, Council adopted Planning and Growth Management Committee Item PG 3.7 “Urbanizing the Avenues Mid-Rise Buildings Symposium Update and Avenue Studies Next Steps” (<http://www.toronto.ca/legdocs/mmis/2007/pg/bgrd/backgroundfile-2401.pdf>).

The report recommended that:

- (1) City Planning establish a Mid-Rise Buildings Interdivisional Team to investigate methods to reduce obstacles and promote the development of mid-rise buildings.
- (2) Report back to Planning and Growth Management Committee on the progress of a Mid-Rise Buildings Action Plan.

ISSUE BACKGROUND

The Avenues

The Avenues are Toronto’s main commercial streets and are identified in the Official Plan as one of four areas that can best accommodate growth. In addition to the Downtown, the Centres, and Employment Districts, reurbanization of the Avenues is anticipated and encouraged to accommodate new housing and job opportunities, while improving streetscapes, shopping, and public transportation - all in a form that is compatible with adjacent land uses, including Neighbourhoods. It is important to note however, that not all lands which fall within the Avenues are designated for growth.

Avenue Studies

The Official Plan provides a framework for the reurbanization of each Avenue through the preparation of Avenue Studies which generally include a vision for the Avenue and an implementation plan which illustrates redevelopment potential and public realm improvements. Section 2.2.3 of the Plan establishes the Avenue Study framework.

Council has made annual recommendations for specific segments of Avenues to be studied in detail. To date, 17 studies have commenced, and 11 have been completed. A summary of completed Avenue Studies is attached. While these studies have been useful, they focus on relatively small portions of the Avenues, and it is necessary to take a more comprehensive view of Avenue potential.

In many portions of the Avenues where Avenue Studies have not been undertaken, the current zoning does not reflect the Official Plan objectives.

For further details about the Avenue Studies completed and currently under way, please visit: <http://www.toronto.ca/planning/studies.htm#ongoing>.

Mid-Rise Buildings Symposium

On November 28 and 29, 2005, City Planning Staff hosted a public symposium entitled “Mid-Rise Buildings – Urbanizing the Avenues”. The purpose of the three part symposium was to explore opportunities for encouraging more mid-rise buildings on Toronto’s Avenues. The ideas and suggestions that emerged were used to inform both the purpose of the Mid-Rise Interdivisional Team and the objectives of the Avenues and Mid-Rise Buildings Study.

For further details about the Mid-Rise Buildings Symposium visit: http://www.toronto.ca/planning/midrise_symposium.htm.

COMMENTS

Since the “Urbanizing the Avenues: Mid-Rise Buildings Symposium Update and Avenue Studies Next Steps” report was adopted, staff have convened a ‘Mid-Rise Buildings Interdivisional Team’ and commissioned the ‘Avenues and Mid-Rise Buildings Study’. The objective of these initiatives is to fulfill the Official Plan goal of reurbanizing the Avenues at a faster rate than is currently occurring.

Mid-Rise Buildings Interdivisional Team

The Mid-Rise Buildings Interdivisional Team was formed in response to the need for coordinated problem solving across all City Divisions and is an integral part of the strategic Mid-Rise Buildings Action Plan. The Team is tasked with exploring solutions that will encourage and facilitate development of mid-rise buildings on the Avenues. Members of the Team were appointed by Division Heads, and selected based on their familiarity and expertise on issues relating to the mid-rise building type and its development.

Representatives include members from the following Divisions and other parties:

- Affordable Housing Office
- City Planning
- Corporate Finance
- Deputy City Manager’s Office, DARP Team
- Economic Development, Culture & Tourism
- Facilities & Real Estate
- Fire Services

- Legal Services
- Municipal Licensing & Standards
- Office of the Mayor
- Parks, Forestry & Recreation
- Social Development, Finance and Administration
- Solid Waste Management
- Technical Services
- Toronto Building
- Toronto Association of Business Improvement Districts
- Toronto Community Housing Corporation
- Toronto Parking Authority
- Toronto Transit Authority
- Toronto Water
- Transportation Services

To date the Team has met on three occasions. The first meeting, held on October 6, 2008, provided an introduction and highlighted the objectives of this initiative. At the second meeting held on December 16, 2008, Team members provided input on potential viable solutions and alternatives to the problems encountered by the mid-rise building development community, including issues that have been identified as barriers by stakeholders at the Mid-Rise Buildings Symposium. The third meeting held on April 28, 2009, provided the Team the opportunity to comment on the Consultant's work to date.

Some solutions currently being explored include developing compliance alternatives for technical issues such as loading and garbage pick-up, potential Ontario Building Code requirements, as well as process-related issues such as a harmonized Site Plan Review and Right-of-Way permit application.

It is anticipated that the Team will continue to meet at least until the end of 2009.

Avenues and Mid-Rise Buildings Study

The 'Avenues and Mid-Rise Buildings Study' currently being prepared by Brook McIlroy Planning + Urban Design/Pace Architects together with Quadrangle Architects is ongoing and is expected to be finalized by the end of 2009.

The main objective of the Study is to expedite and encourage the development of more and better designed mid-rise buildings. Contents of the final report will include:

- a summary of lessons and best practices learned from completed Avenue Studies;
- an analysis of mid-rise building precedents, typologies and test sites;
- a proposed categorization of the Avenues;
- an analysis of lot depths on the Avenues;

- a final set of Mid-Rise Building Performance Standards, a testing of the standards, and the creation of a framework to determine how the Performance Standards may apply to the various categories of Avenues; and
- recommendations for implementation.

To achieve the objectives of the Study, amendments to the regulatory framework may be suggested to ensure that mid-rise buildings are appropriately scaled and responsive to their existing and planned context. One way this can be achieved is through the application of Performance Standards.

Mid-Rise Buildings Performance Standards

The draft Mid-Rise Building Performance Standards, taken from the on-going consultant Study appended to this report, are based on findings from previous Avenue Studies and on the best urban design and built form principles and practices from Toronto and other cities around the world. Performance Standards describe how planned buildings should behave toward each other and how they should enhance the public and private realms. They may be implemented as by-laws, guidelines, or other means such as compliance alternatives.

Thus far, twenty one draft Mid-Rise Building Performance Standards that relate to a wide range of built form issues have been researched, tested and documented by the consultant team and city staff. Further study is required to determine how the Mid-Rise Performance Standards may apply to various types of Avenues.

The draft Mid-Rise Buildings Performance Standards are included in Attachment 1 of this report and are summarized below.

Performance Standard #1: Maximum Allowable Height

The maximum height of buildings will be equal to the width of the Avenue right-of-way abutting the lot only when the built form meets all applicable Performance Standards. It is important to note however, that the dimensions of the development lot will impact the ability of the development to achieve the maximum allowable height.

Performance Standard #2: Minimum Building Heights & Street Wall

All new buildings on the Avenues must achieve a minimum height of 10.5 metres (up to 3 storeys) at the street frontage.

Performance Standard #3: Minimum Ground Floor Height for Retail Uses

To accommodate retail uses, the minimum height of the ground floor is 4.5 metres, measured from grade.

Performance Standard #4: Sunlight on Sidewalks and Front Angular Plane

Building massing will allow sunlight for a minimum of 5 hours on sidewalks (north, east and west) between March 21st and September 21st. To achieve this Performance Standard

a 41-degree angular plane taken from the opposite right-of-way property line will be required.

Performance Standard #5A: Rear Transition to *Neighbourhoods* – Deep properties
The rear transition for deep lots abutting lands designated as Neighbourhoods will include a minimum setback of 7.5 metres to the building face and a 45-degree angular plane from the property line. Where a public laneway abuts the site, the laneway may be included for purposes of establishing the setback and angular plane.

Performance Standard #5B: Rear Transition to *Neighbourhoods* – Shallow properties
The rear transition for shallow lots abutting lands designated as Neighbourhoods will include a minimum setback of 7.5 metres from the property line and a 45-degree angular plane from a height of 10 metres above the 7.5 metre setback line. Where a public laneway abuts the site, the laneway may be included for purposes as of establishing the setback and angular plane.

Performance Standard #5C: Rear Transition to *Employment*
The rear transition for lots abutting lands designated as Employment will include a setback of 7.5 metres from the property line to the face of the building. An additional stepback of 2.5 metres will be required above the 13.5 metre building height.

Performance Standard #6: Corner Sites – Heights & Angular Planes
To better articulate and frame the intersection, the front angular plane and heights that apply to the Avenue frontage will also apply to the other street frontage.

Performance Standard #7: Front Façade Alignment
The street frontages of mid-rise buildings should be built to the front property lines or applicable setback lines for a minimum of 75% of the width of the frontage length. The remaining portion may setback an additional amount up to a maximum of 3 metres.

Performance Standard # 8: Pedestrian Perception Zones
Pedestrian perception stepbacks are required to mitigate the impact of height and to create comfortable pedestrian conditions.

Performance Standard #9: Side Property Setbacks
The base of a mid-rise building should be built to the side property lines for at least the first 20 metres in depth and no less than 10.5 metres of the building height.

Performance Standard #10: Side Property Step-backs
Blank side wall conditions may be temporarily acceptable up to a height of 6 storeys and side step-back walls should be a minimum of 5.5 metres from the property line.

Performance Standard #11: Minimum Sidewalk Zones
Mid-rise buildings should be required to setback at grade to provide a minimum sidewalk zone of 4.8 metres on right-of-way widths that are 30 metres or less and a minimum sidewalk zone of 6.0 metres on right-of-way widths that are greater than 30 metres.

Performance Standard #12: Residential Uses at Grade

Where ground floor residential uses are permitted fronting onto Avenues, three options are being considered:

- A) A minimum setback of 3.0 metres beyond the 4.8 or 6.0 metre sidewalk setbacks and an elevated ground floor between 0.9-1.2 metres will be required. The minimum floor-to-floor height is 3.6 metres.
- B) Where a raised ground floor cannot be provided, a minimum setback of 4.8 metres beyond the required 4.8 or 6.0 metre sidewalk setbacks. The minimum floor-to-floor height is 4.5 metres.
- C) Where individual unit entrances cannot be provided, a minimum setback of 3 metres is required beyond the 4.8 or 6.0 metre sidewalk setbacks. The ground floor will be raised a minimum of 1.2 metres and the minimum ground floor height is 3.3 metres.

Performance Standard #13: Façade Design and Articulation

Mid-rise buildings will be designed to support the public and commercial function of the Avenue through well articulated and appropriately scaled façades. 60 % of the ground floor frontage should be glazed and transparent.

Performance Standard #14: Streetscapes

Avenues streetscapes will provide the highest level of urban design treatment.

Performance Standard #15: Vehicular Access

Vehicular access should be provided via side streets and rear lanes, not the Avenue.

Performance Standard #16: Mid-block Vehicular Access

On mid-block sites, without rear lane access, a front driveway may be permitted provided that there is a minimum distance from the closest intersection and driveway, the driveway does not exceed 7.0 metres in width, and a 6.0 metre wide public lane is provided within the rear setback, parallel to the property line.

Performance Standard #17: Loading and Servicing

Loading, servicing and other vehicular related functions should not detract from the pedestrian realm.

Performance Standard #18: Roof and Roofscapes

Mechanical penthouses may exceed the maximum height limit by up to 5 metres but may not penetrate any angular planes and should be limited to 30% of the roof area.

Performance Standard #19: Design Quality

Mid-rise buildings will reflect design excellence and green building innovation utilizing high-quality materials.

Performance Standard #20 Toronto Green Standards

Mid-rise buildings on the Avenues should achieve Tier 1 and 2 of the Toronto Green Standards.

Performance Standard #21: Heritage Buildings and Districts

All new development on the Avenues will respect and be sensitively integrated with heritage buildings.

Application of the Performance Standards to specific geographic areas of the Avenues will form a fundamental component of the Avenues and Mid-Rise Buildings Study. The balance of the Study will also continue to categorize the Avenues, test and refine the Performance Standards and explore opportunities for implementation.

Consultation

The draft Mid-Rise Building Performance Standards, attached to this report, will be made available through the City's web site at <http://www.toronto.ca/planning/urbdesign/index.htm> in June, and members of the public will have an opportunity to review and comment on them.

City wide consultation will occur once the full draft Avenues and Mid-Rise building Study is complete. It is anticipated that the full draft Study will be made available on the internet by the end of the summer, 2009. The website will be continuously be updated as the Study progresses. To allow the public to learn about the Study, ask questions and provide comments, City staff will seek input from various stakeholders including community groups such as People Plan Toronto and Plan Toronto. It is anticipated that City wide public consultations will take place in early fall 2009.

Timelines

A draft of the Mid-Rise Buildings Performance Standards is attached for information. As part of the process of finalizing the Avenues and Mid-Rise Buildings Study, they will be made available on the internet for review and comment in June, 2009.

The full draft of the Avenues and Mid-Rise Buildings Study is anticipated to be available by the end of the summer, and city-wide consultation will occur in the early fall, 2009.

It is anticipated that staff will report back to members of Planning and Growth Management Committee on the final Avenues and Mid-Rise Buildings Study and the results of the public consultation session by October 2009.

CONTACT

Robert J. Freedman
Director, Urban Design
Tel: 416-392-1126
Fax: 416-392-1744
Email: rfreedm@toronto.ca

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

SIGNATURE

Gary Wright, Chief Planner and Executive Director
City Planning Division

ATTACHMENTS

1. The *draft* Avenues and Mid-Rise Buildings Study (Executive Summary, draft Mid-Rise Performance Standards and summary of completed Avenues Studies)