



**STAFF REPORT
ACTION REQUIRED**

Tall Building Design Guidelines Status Update

Date:	April 6, 2010
To:	Planning and Growth Management Committee
From:	Chief Planner and Executive Director, City Planning Division
Wards:	All
Reference Number:	pg10016

SUMMARY

The purpose of this report is to provide an update on the status of a consultant document titled “Design Criteria for Review of Tall Building Proposals”. This document, more generally referred to at the “Tall Building Design Guidelines”, was adopted by City Council in 2006 for a test period of one year. City Council subsequently extended this period by an additional two years, to January 2010, in order to allow for a greater period of testing through the review of tall building development proposals.

During this test period, the Guidelines have been used by stakeholders including staff, the development industry, and the urban design/architectural community. Consultation with these stakeholders has shown that the document has been well received by staff and by the urban design/architectural community. These stakeholders have also indicated that the document would benefit from some improvements and revisions. The development industry has expressed some concerns with the document, including that some of the criteria are too general to be applied across the entire city.

Despite these concerns, some of the Tall Building Design Guideline criteria have proven to work well throughout the duration of test period and have gained acceptance amongst stakeholders, including the development industry. These criteria, which include minimum and maximum base building heights, a floor plate size limitation, and minimum tower-to-tower separation distances, lend themselves for inclusion in the City’s new zoning by-law. A report on the new Zoning by-law, also before the Committee, discusses these proposed requirements and in which areas of the City they will apply.

This report recommends that the Guidelines continue to be used in the evaluation of tall building development proposals. Notwithstanding this, some changes to the Guideline document are required in order to respond to concerns raised and suggestions for

improvement. The report also recommends, therefore, that the finalized document be presented to Planning and Growth Management Committee in the Spring of 2011 for endorsement as an official City urban design guideline. It will subsequently be incorporated into an updated version of the City's "Urban Design Handbook".

RECOMMENDATIONS

The City Planning Division recommends that:

1. City Council endorse the continued use of the Tall Building Design Guidelines in the evaluation of tall building development proposals throughout the City; and
2. City Planning staff revise the document to respond to issues identified throughout the test period, stylistically format it into the official City of Toronto urban design guideline template, and present it to Planning and Growth Management Committee in the Spring of 2011

Financial Impact

The recommendations in this report have no financial impact.

DECISION HISTORY

At its meeting of March 3, 2003, City Council approved funding to undertake a consultant study to develop design criteria to assist staff with the review of tall building proposals. City Council adopted the resulting report and consultant study, titled "Design Criteria for the Review of Tall Building Proposals" at its meeting of July 25-27, 2006 (<http://www.toronto.ca/legdocs/2006/minutes/council/cc060725.pdf>). In adopting this report, Council authorized implementation of the Tall Building Design Guidelines for a test period of 1 year. City Council subsequently extended this test period by an additional two years, to January 2010, in order to allow for a greater period of testing through the review of tall building development proposals (<http://www.toronto.ca/legdocs/mmis/2008/pg/reports/2008-01-10-pg12-cr.pdf>).

Other related recommendations from City Council (July 25-27, 2006) directed several modifications to the Tall Building Design Guidelines. One of these, incorporating the Appendix on Sustainable Design into the main body of the report, has already been implemented. Another modification, to expand upon text relating to the City's "Percent for Public Art Program", is being addressed within the draft Percent for Public Art Program Guidelines (adopted by City Council in June 2006). Further requests included examination of the need to develop additional design criteria related to the achievement of enhanced pedestrian connections to local transit services, and of the attainment of the City's waste reduction/recycling targets. Assessment of the suitability of these issues will be addressed within the report containing the updated version of the Tall Building Design Guidelines.

ISSUE BACKGROUND

Section 3.1.3 of the Official Plan includes general built form principles for the design of tall buildings. The Tall Building Design Guidelines are intended to elaborate upon and assist with the implementation of these general principles by providing more detailed guidelines which are linked to a common set of measurable criteria (e.g. floor plate size, tower separation distances) and qualitative indicators (e.g. design quality). In addition to the Official Plan, the Guidelines are linked to other City initiatives which also deal with tall building development:

Tall Buildings, Inviting Change in Downtown Toronto

A consultant's study titled "Tall Buildings, Inviting Change in Downtown Toronto" has recently been completed. This study develops locational and height criteria for tall buildings and rules for their development in Downtown Toronto. The findings, recommendations and rules that result from this Study build on criteria within the Tall Building Design Guidelines. This Study will be sent as a communication item to Toronto and East York Community Council for its meeting on May 25, 2010.

City's Harmonized Zoning By-law

Some of the Tall Building Design Guideline criteria lend themselves for inclusion in the City's new zoning by-law. The criteria being included in the proposed zoning by-law are those measures which are important in all tall building proposals, and which have worked well throughout the test period of the Guidelines. They include criteria related to minimum and maximum base building height, floor plate size limitation, and tower-to-tower separation distances. The draft zoning by-law containing these criteria was introduced for public consultation in May 2009. An updated version of the new Zoning By-law, to be released on April 21, 2010, contains revisions to the section concerning tall building requirements. Further discussion on the relationship between the Tall Building Design Guidelines and the new Zoning By-law is included in the Comments section of this report.

COMMENTS

In the period beginning July 2006 and ending in January 2010, the City received approximately 141 site-specific development proposals which could be described as being 'tall buildings' (proposals greater than 12 stories). These proposals were received in all planning districts of the City, and many of them - particularly those outside of the South District - included more than one tall building proposal as part of the single application. The Tall Building Design Guidelines were used by stakeholders to assist both with the design and evaluation of these proposals. The Guidelines were also used to assist in formation of new planning and urban design studies (including the Humber Bay Shores Urban Design Guidelines, the Tall Buildings, Inviting Change in Downtown Toronto study, York University Secondary Plan, the emerging Lawrence Allan Redevelopment, and Downsview Secondary Plan among others). They were also used by the Design Review Panel in their related work.

Staff are satisfied that the Guidelines have been sufficiently applied and examined over the course of the three year test period to allow for their full evaluation. To assist with

this evaluation, stakeholders were engaged throughout the test period via formal meetings and informal mail-outs. A summary of stakeholder comments relating to the document is as follows:

Comments from the Development Industry

The development industry was supportive of the intent of the Tall Building Design Guidelines, but raised some concerns with them. One concern was that the guiding criteria are too general to account for City-wide complexities relating to development nuances such as scale, lot size, and appropriate transition criteria. The suggestion was made by some within this industry that, with this complexity, tall building proposals should be evaluated on a site-by-site basis rather than through City-wide criteria.

In response to this concern, staff note that it was anticipated that detailed urban design guidelines would be formulated to elaborate upon the intent and method of implementation when the Official Plan policies for tall building development were approved. With this direct relationship to the Official Plan, the Tall Building Design Guidelines necessarily have City-wide applicability. Concerns relating to the Guidelines being too general can be addressed through more detailed site specific studies, District studies, or area-focussed studies (such as the one recently completed for Downtown Toronto) as required.

Other concerns of the development industry related to the proposed minimum spacing distances between tall buildings, and side and rear set-back requirements. The response to this concern is discussed further below.

Comments from the Urban Design / Architectural Community

Feedback from this stakeholder group was positive, with one member of the Design Review Panel describing the Guidelines as an ‘essential document’. Various suggestions for improvements to the Guidelines were provided, including stylistic improvements to the diagrams and photographs, reduction in the quantity of explanatory text, and the inclusion of a checklist within the document which would enable users to indicate how they complied with requirements on a point by point fashion.

Comments from City Planning Staff

City Planning staff have found the Guidelines to be very helpful in the assessment of site specific tall building proposals as well as in the preparation of area specific planning and urban design studies. Staff have also indicated that some aspects of the Guidelines could be refined and strengthened. Suggestions included the provision of more direction about the proportion of base building to shaft height, the relationship between base building height and contextual fit, the impact of balcony design upon building articulation, shadow and sky view, and recognition of the differing levels of development intensity in the City.

Tall Building Criteria and the new Zoning By-law

As noted previously, some of the Tall Building Design Guideline criteria lend themselves for inclusion in the City’s new zoning by-law. The criteria which are proposed for inclusion within the zoning by-law are those which are important in all tall building

proposals, and which have worked well throughout the test period of the Guidelines. They are also the ones which have gained acceptance amongst stakeholders, as determined during the consultation process initiated through evaluation of the Tall Building Design Guidelines and the draft new zoning by-law. These criteria are as follows:

Minimum Height of Base Building

A Base Building is defined as the portion of a building which rises below the height equivalent of the adjacent road allowance. Minimum heights for base buildings respect Official Plan policies asking for buildings to define and support a high quality public realm, as they can have the effect of generating more life and pedestrian culture on major streets. They also have the effect of allowing bigger buildings to fit into a context of lower scaled buildings. Minimum building heights also support Provincial Policy Statement (PPS) objectives of building strong communities and undertaking the wise use and management of resources. In recognition of these benefits, various city policy initiatives including the Tall Building Design Guidelines, Tall Buildings, Inviting Change in Downtown Toronto Study, and the Avenues and Mid-Rise Buildings Study include criteria requiring the minimum height of base buildings to be 3 storeys. This provision will be included within new zoning by-law.

Maximum Height of Base Building

Official Plan policy 3.1.3 (1a) states that the base building will provide definition and support at an appropriate scale for adjacent streets, parks and open spaces, integrate with adjacent buildings, minimize the impact of parking and servicing uses. In order for the Base Building to achieve this supporting role, the Guidelines include criteria which limits its height to being within a 45 degree angular plane, as measured from the curb on the opposite side of the street. This upper limit to the base building height helps ensure the base building is responsive to localized street proportions or its contextual height, and results in better sunlight and skyview on the street edge. As this criteria relates directly to the Official Plan policy described above, it is also proposed for inclusion within the new zoning by-law. However, for the purpose of the zoning by-law, this criteria has been translated into a format which is more readily quantifiable but of equivalent geometry, being 0.8 multiplied by the Right-of-Way width. If the property is on a corner site, the height would be calculated on the basis of the widest street in order to give the building a degree of prominence.

Tower Separation

The provision of natural light and privacy are key built form objectives within the Official Plan (section 3.1.2, policy 3 and 4). Quality of life issues in tall buildings are dependent on separation distances which protect access to light, sky view, and privacy; reducing the spacing distances by moving tall building closer together compromises liveability issues within units as well as the quality of the public realm. To achieve this, the Guidelines ask for a minimum separation distance of 25 metres between tall buildings on a lot. In compact urban areas, the Guidelines suggest that this distance will be secured through a minimum 12.5 metre setback of the shaft from the side or rear property line.

Staff are of the opinion that this spacing criteria is very important to achieve a good quality of life for inhabitants of tall buildings and to create acceptable skyview and shadow impacts to adjacent public streets. Subsequently, the minimum 25 metre separation distance between towers on one lot is being proposed as a new regulation within the harmonized zoning by-law. However, further to concerns on this issue raised by the development industry, staff do appreciate that achieving the exact separating distance required within the Guidelines can be difficult at times, particularly on the compact urban sites which are common to The Downtown. The minimum 12.5 metre side and rear setback criteria, therefore, will remain within the Guidelines but are not being introduced as a new regulation within the harmonized zoning by-law at this time.

Floor Plate Size Limitation

The guidelines encourage small floor plates for tall buildings rather than wider slab-form buildings as they are better able to meet Official Plan objectives relating to shadowing, access to natural light, privacy and sky view. Slender buildings also promote sustainability by providing opportunity for increased daylight catchment and more efficient climate control within the building. In order to achieve these benefits, the Guidelines include criteria which indicates that floor plates for residential development should be approximately 750 m² (1860m² for commercial buildings).

Tall Building proposals across the City have generally been able to comply with this criteria, and some proposals in the Downtown have been below this requirement (some examples include 426 University Avenue, 599m²; 31 Balmuto Street, 397m²; and 1000 Bay Street, 377m²). Subsequently, the floor plate size limitation criteria is proposed for inclusion within the new zoning by-law. This provision will limit the floor plate size of the Tower (above the Base Building) to 750 square metres and will apply to any building containing residential units. It will not apply to commercial office buildings, hotel buildings, or hotels which have a residential component.

CONCLUSION

The Tall Building Design Guidelines have been rigorously tested against tall building development proposals throughout the City over a three-year test period. During this time they have gained acceptance amongst stakeholders, and become a vital instrument for Planning staff conducting the assessment of tall building proposals in all areas of the City. The Guidelines have been found to be responsive to localized nuances, and represent a ‘made in Toronto’ approach to the review of tall building proposals.

Some of the Tall Building Design Guideline criteria lend themselves for inclusion in the City’s new zoning by-law. The criteria which are proposed for inclusion within the proposed zoning by-law are those which are important in all tall building proposals, and which have worked well throughout the test period of the Guidelines. They are also ones which have gained acceptance amongst stakeholders, including the development industry. They include criteria related to minimum and maximum base building height, floor plate size limitation, and tower-to-tower separation distances.

The City Planning Division recommends that the Tall Building Design Guidelines continue to be used in the evaluation of tall building development proposals throughout the City. Staff also recommend that the document be revised to respond to issues identified throughout the test period, and stylistically formatted into the official City of Toronto urban design guidelines template. Staff will continue to consult with and respond to industry feedback during this time. The finalized document will be presented to Planning and Growth Management Committee in the Spring of 2011, and subsequently incorporated into an updated version of the City’s “Urban Design Handbook”.

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SIGNATURE

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