

06/15/12

RE: MIDTOWN PLANNING GROUP

Dear Councillors Josh Matlow and Karen Stintz:

Your *Midtown Planning Group* initiative is commendable.

I look forward to planning applying itself full-on to the challenges we are dealing with in unprecedented spiral of development momentum that is outpacing planning in this area.

The *Midtown Planning Group* bodes great planning improvement. It will overcome the current split in jurisdictions that impedes good planning in the *Centre, Growth Centre* and along the *Avenues* AND currently dilutes decision-making by deferring instead to majorities of Councillors with only peripheral interest in the Yonge Eglinton area.

Similarly, consideration should be given to the *Eglinton LRT Corridor* which straddles four different jurisdictions – providing the similar benefits by means of unified planning and decision-making here as well.

Of interest the *Focused Review* process that was applied to planning the *southwest quadrant* block is worthy of consideration as a potential model for staff and community representative discussions.

EGLINTON-MIDTOWN PLAN CLARIFICATION

As a matter of clarification... the *Midtown Planning Group's* name may be confused by some with the similarly named *Eglinton-Midtown Plan* which is a *non-statutory* community-based planning initiative endorsed by FoNTRA.

It should be noted though that these initiatives are not mutually exclusive, but rather, naturally focus upon the same area, the same issues and achieving the same results.

The *Eglinton-Midtown Plan's* origins trace back to 2003 when the *Oriole Park Association* successfully initiated a planning strategy for the *Yonge Eglinton Centre's* southwest quadrant. This is noteworthy, as it resulted in this quadrant today being

the only quadrant in the *Centre* to have a *contemporary planning framework complete with implementing zoning bylaw*.

The *Eglinton-Midtown Plan* has found that in the current planning-development environment the only truly sustainable position has been one where:

“Regardless of the amount of intensification; regardless of the magnitudes of building solutions; and regardless of the extent of development spreads... it's essential to achieve a comprehensive, beneficial public realm outcome – commensurate with development.”

The *Midtown Planning Group* is looked forward to – for its capability to address more fulsomely planning in the area.

The following comments are provided based upon the experience of the *Eglinton-Midtown Plan* in order to inform the *Midtown Planning Group* initiative.

AREA INTENSIFICATION

The pace of development at Yonge Eglinton has reached the point where opinions in the development industry refer to Yonge Eglinton as *Toronto's premiere intensification area*

In the *northeast quadrant* of the *Yonge Eglinton Growth Centre* alone there are 34 potential intensification sites with redevelopment fundamentals equivalent to current developments.

Based upon how events have been unfurling... in 20-years an additional 15,000 people will reside within *walking distance* of the Yonge Eglinton crossroads, located in the *Growth Centre*, along the *Avenues* and in the *Apartment* designations.

Whether such intensification is appropriate is a matter for concerted consideration in order to ensure an astute, rational outcome. Meanwhile, failing to plan for growth and change is a recipe guaranteeing the greatest build out – with the least beneficial outcome.

Indicative of the current pace of intensification, *growth clusters* are emerging where multiple projects adjacent to one another are advancing within the same time frame. These aggregations require a consolidative planning approach in order to unlock beneficial opportunities and reduce the redundancies associated with standalone developments.

In particular the cluster along Eglinton, commencing at Duplex and extending through the Yonge intersection is equivalent in size to Nathan Philip Square. It deserves focused attention. The build-out of this amalgam will result in the total transformation of 200m of Eglinton's streetscape – and may well expand further eastwards to Redpath, and beyond.

Applying planning to these clusters, rather than development control on a plot by plot basis, enables the implementation of *Secondary Plan* policies such as transportation infrastructure, amongst others, that are not otherwise attainable on a site by site basis.

INTEGRATED PLANNING

Intensification in North Toronto includes residential, retail/commercial and significant transit developments. All these endeavours need to be planned in sync in order to ensure a singular urban outcome. *It's about consolidation.* It's not just about establishing an urban planning and decision-making structure that over-arches geographical separations. It requires an interlaced planning endeavour encompassing all streams of: urban, transit and street/road planning.

At present these separate planning initiatives are proceeding in a highly independent fashion. Though they may profess consideration of each other, there are recognizable slips between one another.

The time lines are disjoint, as for instance: the design of LRT transit station facilities will be completed prior to the *Eglinton Corridor's* urban planning exercise – which rightfully should be informing the design of these stations.

What follows is a brief summary of planning for each development segment:

1 – URBAN PLANNING

Presently, Yonge Eglinton is administered from afar by two distinct and distant planning faculties. The division cuts right down the middle of both the Eglinton and Yonge Avenues. Furthermore, it partitions the *Growth Centre* and splits the *Centre* right through to its core at the Yonge Eglinton crossroads.

This is a perplexing situation considering that the *Centre* is by name and by nature a unified structure of singular stature. However instead we find ourselves today in a circumstance colloquially known as *riding two stools...* with often a slip *between the cup and the lip.*

Of note, North Toronto is unlike the older *downtown Toronto* and again it is distinct from the more contemporary *North York* condition. Yonge Eglinton has its own unique *urban character* – as readily exemplified, for instance, by its 'lazy' street structure where...

- a walk around the block can be a mile long proposition, *without intersecting side streets*
- retail streets lack effective back lanes, *forcing retail traffic into residential neighbourhoods*
- intersections are mismatched, *bedeviling both pedestrian and vehicular circulations.*

As a result of its distinct structure North Toronto has differences with the *Tall Building guidelines.* These guidelines were first developed with regard for the North York context, and the later guidelines were devised for the Downtown. In neither case was the Yonge Eglinton area in mind when these guidelines were developed.

The *Yonge Eglinton Centre* was recently designated by the *Official Plan*, becoming Toronto's fifth *Centre*. As a result it is the only *Centre* without a *Town Hall* and its planning and governance.

The *Centre's* planning framework was intentionally defined as having greater latitudes and flexible than other designations – presuming that proposals within this area would undergo a focused planning process commensurate with the area's enterprise and significance. In reality planning in the area has dwindled into simply exercising development control assessments. It is hoped that the creation of the *Midtown Planning Group* will rejuvenate these efforts.

Likewise, it is hoped that the *Midtown Planning Group* will comprehensively articulate effective *algorithms for transitions and relationships*. These measures for arriving at appropriate solutions have so far not been addressed – and as a result these conditions have fueled contentious debacles over what constitutes *appropriate development*.

2 - TRANSIT PLANNING

The TTC has three principal objectives:

1. to provide an *effective* transit system;
2. to provide an *affordable* service; and
3. to respect the *urban environment*.

The last objective speaks to the integration of planning practices.

The Yonge subway line frequently *crests beyond capacity at rush hour* with passengers having to let full trains pass through before boarding. It begs the question whether Yonge Eglinton's transit oriented intensification is truly sustainable.

Construction of the *Eglinton Crosstown LRT* is recognizably a mega-structure exercise involving *urban, transit, road and construction stage planning*.

The LRT's transit planning and design to date has been primarily focused upon broad stroke decisions and below grade construction. Design work has more recently, though partially, commenced on some of the ground level stations. It has been found that the tributary evolutions of the bus networks have not been taken into consideration, nor any regard for future intensification distributions and likewise modal shifts over time.

Upon completion of the LRT, the existing *bus network* currently emanating out of the *Yonge Eglinton Station* will see these routes *snap* to their relevant local LRT stations. At each of these locations passengers need a secure and comfortable facility to wait for buses, likewise buses need pad space to wait for passengers and the buses need the capability to turn about – in order that they may be tasked to server the local passenger watershed.

The preliminary designs for the Chaplin and Avenue Rd stations in particular have not been conceived with these capabilities in mind. Urban planning's position is that these are minor stations – which in truth speaks more about the attention being applied than anything else. Each of these stations is the most substantial *city-building* component in their specific locality.

Residential development in these locations is being permitted to take up available lands that could otherwise provide for comprehensive station layouts. It's ironic that these development's justify their intensity based upon their proximity to the self-same transit station which they are constricting, thwarting robust station solutions.

The development rationalization is a convenient self-serving argument – considering that it is buses that deliver more passengers to these stations than these developments themselves. Simply put: Which initiative should take priority?

YONGE EGLINTON TRANSIT GATEWAY

In the instance of the Yonge Eglinton Transit Station, there can be no doubt that this is a significant station with high volume and complex evolutions: entering, exiting and transferring between lines.

What is not necessary appreciated is the station's *transit gateway* potential which if appropriately configured will enable the *Yonge Eglinton Town Centre* to evolve as a truly transit-based *Town Centre*.

In such a solution... the daily through-put of transit riders would become the primary target market – '*foot traffic*' in the *shopping centre lexicon* – nourishing retail and commercial growth.

The extensive reconstruction slated for the *Yonge Line* platform and associated concourse work will make this the most modern station on the *Yonge Line* which dates back to the 1950s. This unique opportunity needs to be beneficially exploited.

Whether mining transit ridership is seen as an opportunity or simply a necessity is of little difference... the fact remains that the *Yonge Eglinton Town Centre's* retail-commercial growth is highly constricted from a vehicular perspective as the area lacks the access routes that the other *Centre's* have to high volume thoroughfares.

In truth? Yonge Eglinton's commercial-retail future pivots upon establishing a robust *transit gateway*.

THE VOID

Construction of the *Yonge Eglinton Station* works involves a substantial excavation creating a structural box 470m long and 20m deep. The intention at this time is to backfill the majority of this *void* after completing the track work and station levels.

The magnitude of this surplus, this *void*, is equivalent in scale to an 800-car parking structure.

Transit engineers inform me that in some other cities they utilize these *voids* as finished usable space. For this reason I believe the opportunity this *void* presents should be assessed. It is not only strategically located space that could be advantageous applied to the overall beneficial configuration of the *Yonge Eglinton Town Centre* – it is also a profitable venture for our cash-strapped City.

3 – TRAFFIC PLANNING

The introduction of the *Eglinton LRT* will result in a significant change in traffic patterns along Eglinton and likewise the *surrounding road network*. One of the marked changes will be the reduction in bus traffic traverses.

Eglinton's *road structure* and the broader *streetscape* considerations as a whole will be reshaped throughout this thoroughfare. Therefore the design of Eglinton's road structure and streetscapes require substantial consideration.

Likewise, the LRT construction work along Eglinton will involve a protracted era of road restriction and associated detours. Recognizing that North Toronto's *local road network* is constrained and disjointed, preparing an appropriate *temporary road strategy* is likewise of critical concern.

CONCLUSION

Having *one over-arching singular planning faculty* is essential.

The *Midtown Planning Group* is most capable of performing this role.

On the basis of the above I wholeheartedly support this *Midtown Planning Group* initiative.

Sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of several overlapping, horizontal, wavy lines that form a stylized name.

Terry Mills
B.ARCH MCIP RPP