



204 High Park (northwest corner of High Park & Humberside) by photographer, John Huzil (1995)

8 October 2015

Councillor David Shiner
Chair
Planning & Growth Management Committee
Toronto City Hall
100 Queen Street West
Toronto, ON M5H 2N2

Dear Planning & Growth Management Committee members:

It is my pleasure to write on behalf of the Junction Heritage Conservation District (HCD) Committee regarding the *Mid-Rise Building Performance Standards Monitoring* report and our experience with the zoning application # 14 152731 WET 13 OZ for 2978-2982 Dundas Street West & 406-408 Pacific Avenue.

The Junction Heritage Conservation District

As you may recall, based on our laymen's understanding of the *Report from the Chief Planner and Executive Director, City Planning on Mid-Rise Building Performance Standards Monitoring* and appendices, our original focus was specific to height references and recommendations about Character Areas with 20-metre right-of-way roads. Given a deferral, we have provided additional analysis of other proposed changes presented in the evaluation report that also pertain to Character Areas with a 20-metre road.

Junction HCD Committee

Catherine Illingworth
Martin Lennox
Tina Leslie
Madeleine McDowell
Neil Ross
Christopher Sears
David Wencer

Despite a Character Area designation, we are now a prime example of the unintended consequences of an Avenue designation with strict, one-size-fits-all mid-rise guidelines applied in a narrow right-of-way context.

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During the past 45 years, we had an established pattern of respect for the traditional built form and character of the Junction as a standard for contemporary improvements, and self-restraint was the prevailing precedent set by the commercial property owners when they revitalised their buildings.

We hoped the building on the north-west corner of Dundas Street West and Pacific Avenue and property owner would be respectful of and could be held accountable to the same spirit of compliance and conduct followed by their neighbours. Unfortunately, in our opinion, the members of the Etobicoke York Community Council (EYCC) did not have any tools to mitigate the impact of the Avenue designation, or the set of performance standards that were applied to this new mid-rise building on our 20-metre road. Regrettably, the recommendations in this monitoring report have arrived a little too late to help the Junction neighbourhood.

At the September Planning and Growth Management Committee meeting we demonstrated that the proposed height and scale of the newly approved mid-rise building was out of proportion with all other structures on the local main road that passes through the Junction neighbourhood. This building will dominate the historic main street and the entire community; even though, according to Harold Madi, Director of Urban Design, when referencing the main performance standards, “mid-rise buildings are to be no taller than the width of the primary street they address.”¹

The Junction Character Area and future HCD is, or was – a microcosm of the original village that became a City before amalgamating with Toronto in 1909. We hope the historic value of a mainly intact, contiguous fine-grain retail, neighbourhood main street that is integrated with its residential community will not be irreparably diminished by this prominent mid-rise building.

We often read about incremental growth in planning policies and guidelines. Perhaps our definition of ‘incremental’ differs from that of the Planning department. Since the typical Junction building height on Dundas Street West is two or three storeys, we can accept the doubling in height of every main street property as an incremental change, but don’t consider a jump from two or three storeys to seven or eight storeys as incremental.

However, as acknowledged in the monitoring report, “Specifically, participants noted a pattern of buildings repeatedly exceeding the 1:1 ratio on 20 metre right-of-way streets in Character Areas.”² Our mid-rise building experience reinforces this analysis.

“Section 2.3.1 of the Official Plan contains Healthy Neighbourhoods policies, which state that the intensification of land adjacent to neighbourhoods will be carefully controlled so that neighbourhoods are protected from negative impact. Developments in *Mixed Use Areas* that are adjacent or close to *Neighbourhoods* will, among other matters, be compatible with those *Neighbourhoods*, provide a gradual transition of scale and density to the *Neighbourhoods*.”³

Again, our HCD team and the community we serve do not consider a jump from two or three storeys to seven or eight storeys as “a gradual transition of scale,” nor “a carefully controlled” intensification.

¹ *Attachment 6: Chief Planner Roundtable Summary*, 24 April 2015, page 1.

² *Report from the Chief Planner and Executive Director, City Planning on Mid-Rise Building Performance Standards Monitoring*, 28 August 2015, page 9.

³ *Staff report for action – Final Report – 2978-2982 Dundas St W and 406-408 Pacific Ave V.05/13*, page 4.

Our team and the Junction community therefore concurs with the staff suggestion that, “further restrictions to the maximum permitted height may be appropriate in the older parts of the city where the established traditional ‘main street’ urban fabric remains intact. In these areas, the prevailing built character is generally comprised of 20 metre wide ROWs [right-of-way’s] framed by continuous 2-storey, street-oriented, mixed-use buildings with narrow storefronts, and often of heritage significance. In these cases, height should be restricted to a ratio of 0.8:1 between total building height and planned right-of-way width, or 16 metres.”⁴

However, we would encourage immediate action on these changes and implementation to be effective without further delay instead of the recommended, “consider further work to restrict total building height to 16 metres or 80% of the 20 metre right-of-ways for specified Character Areas.”⁵

The Junction Heritage District Nomination

West Toronto Junction began as a village, grew into a town and then established itself as the City of West Toronto before amalgamating with City of Toronto in 1909. The district is rich with heritage architecture in many styles, from the century mark and earlier, as well as an eclectic mixture of buildings from subsequent eras. Conservation has been a part of the Junction culture for more than four decades. Today, we benefit from those previous preservation efforts and we are proud to continue that culture of conservation for current and future generations.

There is distinct heritage in the Junction which differentiates it from other areas of the cosmopolitan City of Toronto. It is an area in which architecture significantly contributes to the neighbourhood’s identity. The Junction was an independent, mixed-income, industrial suburb of Toronto with fortunes heavily tied to the railroad industry. It is noted for many Victorian and Edwardian homes, and local brick works provided the material that built this town. Local brick is also featured in the award-winning poetry of Glen Downie. Brick is so much a part of our identity that when the new Heintzman Place condo was built, local residents insisted that it be a predominantly brick building instead of the glass tower design that was proposed.

Another distinctive feature of the Junction HCD is that it transcends the contemporary Keele Street boundary between Ward 13 and Ward 14. The proposed HCD boundary will re-unite the Junction.

⁴ Item H, *Report from the Chief Planner and Executive Director, City Planning on Mid-Rise Building Performance Standards Monitoring*, 28 August 2015, page 21.

⁵ Performance Standard #19A-G, *Attachment 1: Chart of Comments and Recommended Actions*, 28 August 2015, page 14.

We are also fortunate to have the support of our local BIA, and many main street owners have properties listed on the Heritage Inventory Register, which ensured much of the original architecture is intact for the enjoyment of everyone today and in the future.

If you wish to read the nomination application, please visit the Junction HCD website at: <http://www.junctionhcd.ca/>

The Junction HCD nomination application was endorsed by:

- two councillors, Doucette and Perks – along with the Etobicoke York Community Council and Toronto & East York Community Council members that supported the nomination application

And received endorsement letters from:

- the Junction Business Improvement Area
- West Bend Community Association
- West Toronto Junction Historical Society
- Junction residents and property owners
- a respected preservation architect, Catharine Nasmith
- Etobicoke York Preservation Panel – *a copy of this letter is attached for your reference*

A copy of the Bloor West Villager InsideToronto.ca article about the approved new mid-rise building by EYCC is also attached for your reference. Please refer to: *Junction building design referred to as 'stack of ice trays' given green light by west-end councillors* (11 September 2015).

Definitions:

A minor variance (at the Committee of Adjustment) should be measured in centimetres not metres.

Total height, as defined by the right-of-way formula and expressed by Harold Madi, should mean that everything is included – it's the maximum allowable height; not just the height of the building with extras for mechanical penthouses, railings, elevator overruns, et cetera.

Incremental growth or intensification in Character Areas should not exceed double the existing structure. For example, two-storeys would become four-storeys and three-storeys could increase to a maximum of six-storeys (including the requisite step-backs and complimentary design contexts).

The concept of precedent should equally value and consider the community context, especially when other property owners did not 'over-build' even though they could. Just because you can, doesn't mean you should!

Exceptions should be granted sparingly. It cannot be considered the normal course of action when development applications too often exceed the established guidelines. Exceptions should be exceptional and truly extraordinary.

The value of an historic building is more than its aesthetic façade or heritage pedigree. A contiguous strip of older smaller buildings with a diverse vintage has a rich human-scale streetscape that contributes to a desirable residential and commercial environment. It is the collective sum-of-the-parts that is integral to the healthy urban *Neighbourhood* premise; whereas the newly approved mid-rise development ignores that rich streetscape texture and natural context.

Essential Mid-Rise Concepts

- i. Local main streets are interconnected with their adjacent neighbourhoods! These main street ‘Avenues’ should not be arbitrarily severed from their *Neighbourhoods*, especially in Character Areas with 20-metre roads, such as the Junction.
- ii. Study participants indicated “a preference to re-organize the order of the Performance Standards,” and we would suggest that the order be reversed to begin with the Character Area standards #19 A through G.⁶

If healthy, stable *Neighbourhoods* are important and the pedestrian-friendly, local main streets are inextricably connected to those neighbourhoods, and these are genuinely valued as basic, positive planning and design outcomes, then we feel it follows that these policies should be at the forefront to place emphasis on accepting the existing context as a priority for any new development project in a Character Area.

Furthermore, if conservation of Heritage Districts and Character Areas is a desired outcome, then the order of the policies should start with the healthy *Neighbourhoods* and the #19 performance standards should be mandatory givens – not an afterthought and relegated to the end of the standards document.

- iii. “New buildings are not expected to maximize or replicate the envelope prescribed by the guidelines, but rather they are expected to respect the envelope and employ creative designs within it.”⁷

We believe the building envelope is correlated with the issue of total height. This is also where the focus of constraint needs to be firmly established, because if these limitations on height and building envelope are well-defined at the start of the process, then in our opinion the rest of the guidelines fall into place or are layered on afterward. For example, with a

⁶ Report from the Chief Planner and Executive Director, *City Planning on Mid-Rise Building Performance Standards Monitoring*, 28 August 2015, page 10.

⁷ Report from the Chief Planner and Executive Director, *City Planning on Mid-Rise Building Performance Standards Monitoring*, 28 August 2015, page 15.

reduced height ratio of 0.8:1 (16 metres with some flexibility that cannot without exception exceed the 20 metre road width) and a less-maximised building envelope that is contained within all angular planes, then we should have incremental growth on Dundas Street West in the Junction.

Ideally, we strongly prefer that new buildings (built form) must blend with the surrounding local context, which may involve further clarity to ensure that contemporary structures blend into the Character Areas. Architectural context is critical!

- iv. We definitely agree with the concept of 'Pedestrian Perception Step-back' for mid-rise buildings.

Ensuring compliance with Performance Standard #4B, especially in Character Areas is essential and following established set-backs should be mandatory. Also, if standards #19 A through G were listed as primary priorities then perhaps new buildings would automatically have more consistent cornice and datum lines at the mandatory set-back level.

While we are neutral with respect to the renaming of this to 'Front Façade: Street Wall Step-backs' we do agree that “Buildings on 20 m[etre] right-of-way[s] should have a 1.5 m[etre] step-back at a height of: 10.5 metres.”⁸

Moreover, we expect the proposed change of the step-back policy corresponds correctly to the angular plane rule at the reduced height of 0.8:1 ratio.

- v. We disagree with the Amenity Space recommendation “that private balconies that meet the Performance Standard #12 be encouraged for all units.”⁹ If balconies are not a prevailing feature within the local context, new mid-rise buildings on the ‘Avenue’ should not be introduced into the Character Area or HCD by the performance standard guidelines.

Moreover, we disagree with including a clarification that “recessed balconies on 2nd and 3rd floors are permitted and encouraged” unless balconies are a prevailing feature within the local context.¹⁰

- vi. We concur with the general Heritage statement that “Further Study is recommended to determine if a more nuanced approach to the *Avenues* element is appropriate to address heritage policies and the ‘Character Areas’ on the *Avenues*.”¹¹

⁸ *Attachment 1: Chart of Comments and Recommended Actions*, 28 August 2015, page 6.

⁹ *Attachment 1: Chart of Comments and Recommended Actions*, 28 August 2015, page 3.

¹⁰ *Attachment 1: Chart of Comments and Recommended Actions*, 28 August 2015, page 11.

- vii. We agree with the recommendation to create “criteria for exceptions to this [the Minimum Ground Floor Height] Performance Standard [#3] based on retail character of the surrounding area.”¹²

Although, if the Performance Standards #19A through G were listed as a first priority and were defined as mandatory expected outcomes, then the ground floor height and cornice lines would automatically be aligned. Surely, if local context is explicit, then it should be unnecessary to specifically request consideration of these design features by architects when designing mid-rise buildings in designated Character Areas.

- viii. We concur with the feedback in Performance Standard #4A – “Minimum 5hrs of sunlight should be increased to 7hrs for areas outside of downtown core” and “Angular plane starting at 80% of right-of-way width does not work because it creates high façades in character areas with predominantly low-rise buildings.”

Therefore, we disagree with the recommended action to be “Include 5 hours of sunlight on adjacent/fronting main streets in Official Plan Built Form Policy.”¹³ Instead the sunlight policy definition should be increased to seven hours of sunlight especially in the Junction Character Area.

- ix. We disagree with continued exclusion of the mechanical penthouse in the total height maximum, as per the recommended action which seeks to “Clarify that the definition of *total building height* is measured as the distance between the elevation of the established grade and the elevation of the highest point on the building (excluding only the mechanical penthouses).¹⁴

Similarly, this same recommended action is reiterated in Roofs & Roofscapes Performance Standard #13, “Mechanical penthouses may exceed the max height limit by up to 5 metres but may not penetrate any angular plane.”¹⁵ As stated earlier, we object strongly to

¹¹ *Attachment 1: Chart of Comments and Recommended Actions*, 28 August 2015, page 4.

¹² *Report from the Chief Planner and Executive Director, City Planning on Mid-Rise Building Performance Standards Monitoring*, 28 August 2015, page 10.

¹³ *Attachment 1: Chart of Comments and Recommended Actions*, 28 August 2015, page 6.

¹⁴ *Attachment 1: Chart of Comments and Recommended Actions*, 28 August 2015, page 5.

¹⁵ *Attachment 1: Chart of Comments and Recommended Actions*, 28 August 2015, page 12.

concessions for additional height; the total means that's the absolute maximum in the 1:1 ratio.

- x. If the Character Area designation means nothing except to put 'lipstick and mascara' on a new mid-rise building, as expressed by Performance Standards #19 A through G, what's the point!

We believe that Character Areas provide many public benefits and include the following research to support that position.

Empirical Evidence to Support Changes to the Mid-Rise Guidelines in Character Areas

In *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, Jane Jacobs observed that "Cities need old buildings so badly it is probably impossible for vigorous streets and districts to grow without them." [A] Preservation Green Lab report provides the most complete empirical validation to date of Jacobs' long-respected, but largely untested hypothesis: That neighborhoods containing a mix of older, smaller buildings of diverse age support greater levels of positive economic and social activity than areas dominated by newer, larger buildings. These findings support the idea that retaining blocks of older, smaller, mixed-vintage buildings can help cities achieve sustainable development goals and foster great neighborhoods.¹⁶

All across America, blocks of older, smaller buildings are quietly contributing to robust local economies and distinctive livable communities. This groundbreaking study demonstrates the unique and valuable role that older, smaller buildings play in the development of sustainable cities. Building on statistical analysis of the built fabric of three major American cities, the research demonstrates that established neighborhoods with a mix of older, smaller buildings perform better than districts with larger, newer structures when tested against a range of economic, social, and environmental outcome measures.¹⁷

The Junction Character Area and future Heritage District is, or was before the newly-approved mid-rise building, an intact collection of several blocks of older, smaller, and mixed-vintage buildings. It was also a distinctive, award-winning Heritage Toronto destination, a great neighbourhood to visit and to live.

¹⁶ National Trust for Historic Preservation, *Older, Smaller, Better: Measuring how the character of buildings and blocks influences urban vitality*, May 2014, http://www.preservationnation.org/information-center/sustainable-communities/green-lab/oldersmallerbetter/report/NTHP_PGL_OlderSmallerBetter_ReportOnly.pdf.

¹⁷ National Trust for Historic Preservation, *Older, Smaller, Better: Measuring how the character of buildings and blocks influences urban vitality*, May 2014, <http://www.preservationnation.org/information-center/sustainable-communities/green-lab/oldersmallerbetter/#.Vg6zGpeE3Jd>.

We all know and sense that people like the character and authenticity of older buildings, but their power is far more than just aesthetic. They are tremendous engines of economic growth, vitality and quality of life.¹⁸

Our team has heard the stories of many residents' who chose the Junction over other alternative places to call home in the City for the reasons expressed in the Preservation Green Lab study. We also know that other Toronto residents frequently visit the Junction because of its unique character, which exists almost solely because of its natural and gradual evolution from village to city.

Older neighborhoods with a mixture of small, mixed-age buildings have significantly higher Walk Score® rankings and Transit Score® ratings than neighborhoods with large, new buildings.¹⁹

The typical Junction Walk and Transit Scores are 93, a 'Walker's Paradise' rating, and 79, an 'Excellent Transit' ranking, respectively.

An executive summary of the Preservation Green Lab report is attached for your reference.

Stephanie K. Meeks, president of the National Trust for Historic Preservation spoke at a Preservation Symposium at The Grain Exchange in Milwaukee. The following are excerpts of her remarks about livable cities on March 19, 2015:

Across America, the story is the same: Old buildings help cities grow, develop and become communities. They are necessary to the civic and municipal fabric, and the key to long-term success.

And to unleash their full potential, they need to be coupled with sound and effective public policies that put vacant and underutilized buildings to work. Policies that can make the difference between stagnant, at-risk neighborhoods and thriving and growing communities.

Speaking in general terms, we believe property owners should be encouraged to maintain the unique and distinctive facets of their historic buildings.

Preservation is about keeping buildings alive, in active use, and relevant to the needs of the people and the cities that surround them.

We want to help historic neighborhoods continue to thrive, in a way that includes all residents, by unleashing the power and potential of older buildings.²⁰

¹⁸ Meeks, Stephanie, National Trust for Historic Preservation, *Older Buildings, Livable Cities*, 20 March 2015, <http://blog.preservationleadershipforum.org/2015/03/20/meeks-older-buildings-livable-cities/#.Vg6w8JeE3Jd>.

¹⁹ National Trust for Historic Preservation, *Older, Smaller, Better: Measuring how the character of buildings and blocks influences urban vitality*, May 2014, http://www.preservationnation.org/information-center/sustainable-communities/green-lab/oldersmallerbetter/report/NTHP_PGL_OlderSmallerBetter_ReportOnly.pdf.

We do not believe the mid-rise performance standard guidelines do enough to create sustainable communities. Instead these intensification strategies and policies are threatening to destroy the essence of the century-old, former city that generations of Junction property owners have quietly preserved.

Creating Sustainable Communities

The Preservation Green Lab research work continued to explore other aspects of sustainable communities, and another study quantified the consequence of preserving rather than demolishing older buildings. An excerpt from the research study is presented below.

Preservationists instinctively get it—older and historic buildings, historic neighborhoods, and Main Streets are, by definition, sustainable. Yet all too often the role of older and historic buildings is overlooked and in some instances older buildings are even demolished as part of a community’s sustainable planning efforts. Fortunately, a growing body of research is providing ample support that makes the message clear: Preserving historic buildings is an essential means by which a community can achieve broader economic, social, and environmental goals—the three pillars of sustainability.²¹

A report produced by the Preservation Green Lab of the National Trust for Historic Preservation provides the most comprehensive analysis to date of the potential environmental benefit of building reuse. This groundbreaking study, [The Greenest Building: Quantifying the Environmental Value of Building Reuse](#), concludes that, **when comparing buildings of equivalent size and function, building reuse almost always offers environmental savings over demolition and new construction.**

The report’s key findings offer policy-makers, building owners, developers, architects and engineers compelling evidence of the merits of reusing existing buildings as opposed to tearing them down and building new.²²

Those findings include:

²⁰ Meeks, Stephanie, National Trust for Historic Preservation, *Older Buildings, Livable Cities*, 20 March 2015, <http://blog.preservationleadershipforum.org/2015/03/20/meeks-older-buildings-livable-cities/#.Vg6w8JeE3Jd>.

²¹ National Trust for Historic Preservation, *Creating Sustainable Communities*, (undated), <http://www.preservationnation.org/information-center/sustainable-communities/creating/>.

²² National Trust for Historic Preservation, *The Environmental Value of Building Reuse*, 24 January 2012, <http://www.preservationnation.org/information-center/sustainable-communities/green-lab/valuing-building-reuse.html#.Vg7oP5eE3Jc>.

Reuse Matters. Building reuse typically offers greater environmental savings than demolition and new construction. It can take between 10 to 80 years for a new energy efficient building to overcome, through efficient operations, the climate change impacts created by its construction. The study finds that the majority of building types in different climates will take between 20-30 years to compensate for the initial carbon impacts from construction.

Scale Matters. Collectively, building reuse and retrofits substantially reduce climate change impacts. Retrofitting, rather than demolishing and replacing, just 1% of the city of Portland's office buildings and single family homes over the next ten years would help to meet 15% of their county's total CO₂ reduction targets over the next decade.

Design Matters. The environmental benefits of reuse are maximized by minimizing the input of new construction materials. Renovation projects that require many new materials can reduce or even negate the benefits of reuse.

The Bottom Line: Reusing existing buildings is good for the economy, the community and the environment. At a time when our country's foreclosure and unemployment rates remain high, communities would be wise to reinvest in their existing building stock. Historic rehabilitation has a **thirty-two year track record of creating 2 million jobs and generating \$90 billion in private investment.** Studies show residential rehabilitation **creates 50% more jobs** than new construction.

Rehabilitation of older buildings should be a primary objective, not positioned as the second-last thought in the Mid-Rise document. As per Performance Standard #19 F, "Additions to existing buildings is an alternative to redevelopment projects on the Avenues, and should be encouraged in areas with an existing urban fabric." Preserving the original built-form fabric should be the standard applied to development proposals in all Character Area *Neighbourhood* Avenues.

The damage to our neighbourhoods and communities will be irreparable, if these mid-rise guidelines continue to ignore the potential of retaining the older, smaller buildings on the main street that has made the Junction a dynamic, desirable location.

A Final Recommendation

Integration of Heritage Preservation Services (HPS) staff in the development application review process should be required for the approved pool of HCD nomination applications awaiting their turn for Study approval. Of the sixteen nomination applications considered by HPS in 2014, twelve remain in limbo; the Junction is one of the twelve.

Alternatively, provide adequate funding for all of the HCD nominations in the queue.

In the meantime, provide access to planning staff resources to write a Character Area description for the Junction to supplement the Mid-Rise guidelines document. This description would inform planning staff and property owners as to what constitutes acceptable development in the Character Area until the official HCD Study design guidelines can be provided.

In closing, the Junction HCD team is asking for your support of our position to the recommended changes of the Mid-Rise performance standards in Character Areas, and to hasten their implementation so as to strengthen the conservation of all Character Areas and Heritage Districts.

While we wish these recommendations could have come forward sooner, the Junction HCD team and community will take solace in knowing the unintended consequences of the former mid-rise guidelines won't be repeated after the November 3rd City Council meeting.

Thank you for your consideration in this important matter.

From the Junction HCD Committee:

Tina Leslie, Chair
Catherine Illingworth
Martin Lennox
Madeleine McDowell
Neil Ross
Christopher Sears
David Wencer

ETOBICOKE YORK COMMUNITY PRESERVATION PANEL

October 14, 2014

Mary L. MacDonald
Acting Manager
Heritage Preservation Services

Dear Mary:

RE: The Junction Heritage Conservation District

I am writing at the request of the Etobicoke York Community Preservation Panel to support the application to create The Junction Heritage Conservation District.

The Junction was once an independent village, and then town, but what makes it unique is that enough of the fabric of that early community remains today to make it easily identifiable as the same town. Its history is easily readable in the significant number of residential, commercial and industrial buildings that still represent the boom town era that gave birth to The Junction.

The City of Toronto has already recognized the value of The Junction by designating Dundas Street West as a "character area." The creation of a Heritage Conservation District will ensure that the heritage along Dundas and within the surrounding streets is protected for the future. Recent development initiatives have already threatened to reduce the impact of those heritage features that have been preserved for so long.

The Etobicoke York Community Preservation Panel has met with The Junction HCD Committee, and had the opportunity to discuss and question the application in some detail. We strongly support this application to create The Junction HCD so that the protection this designation can offer the community will ensure The Junction remains a landmark community for many years to come.

Yours truly,



Denise Harris
Chair
Etobicoke York Community Preservation Panel
416-621-6006 denise.harris@sympatico.ca

cc: Michael Vidoni, Heritage Planner, HPS
Sarah Doucette, Councillor
Gordon Perks, Councillor
Tina Leslie, Chair, Junction HCD Committee
Etobicoke York Community Preservation Panel

Junction building design referred to as ‘stack of ice trays’ given green light by west-end councillors

Glass-heavy structure doesn't fit in with area's heritage says president of local historical society



Application approved

Courtesy photo

Etobicoke York Community Council approved an application for a glass-heavy, eight-storey building at the corner of Dundas Street and Pacific Avenue in the Junction despite local residents' opposition the design is out of character with the area.

By Cynthia Reason

A controversial proposal calling for a new eight-storey, glass-heavy rental building in the historic heart of the Junction was given the go-ahead at Etobicoke York Community Council (EYCC) this week, despite a split vote.

With Tuesday's EYCC approval, the development of the 43-unit building will now proceed at 2978-2982 Dundas St. W. and 406-408 Pacific Ave. – a site where local residents and some city councillors argued a modern building that tall would “stick out like a sore thumb.”

“The building that we’re seeing proposed – this stack of ice trays – has nothing to offer this community; nothing to offer the heritage, the history, and the vibrance along Dundas West in this community,” said Neil Ross, president of the West Toronto Junction Historical Society, in his appeal to councillors to reject the application.

“The landmark buildings in the Junction have a commitment to the community. They’re not six floors of glass and greed; they are a statement of a community that has survived with a historical identity that is unique in this city.”

Other local residents, like Pacific Avenue's Janet McKay, asked that council defer a decision on the application until the West Toronto Junction Historical Society hear the results of its own application to have the area designated a Heritage Preservation District.

That application, however, was deemed only a "medium priority" and likely won't be revisited until 2017, Parkdale-High Park Councillor Sarah Doucette reported, explaining why the application can't be deferred.

"I was really hoping it would be (considered) in this first batch, but it's not – it's going to be considered in 2017," she said, noting that a Heritage Preservation District application is at least a two-year process from there. "We can't just turn this proponent away in the meantime. A proponent has put in an application in and we must deal with it."

Doucette furthermore explained to her fellow councillors how the developers of the site, represented at Tuesday's meeting by Melanie Melnyk of R.E. Millward & Associates Ltd., had met with the community to get feedback on their proposal even before bringing those plans to the city.

After that pre-application meeting, Doucette said the applicant made several changes to their proposal based on community concerns – bringing the height down to 24.5 metres from 27 metres, reducing the number of residential units to 43 from 51, adding more masonry to the glass-heavy design, and adding setbacks at the third and eighth storeys to reduce the building's visual impact, among others.

"If we do turn this application down, or even defer it, the proponent has the opportunity to go to the Ontario Municipal Board (OMB). And once it goes to the OMB, we lose so much control," she said, shortly before requesting that her fellow councillors approve the application, with the caveat that local residents – including members of the West Toronto Junction Historical Society, the Junction Residents' Association, the Junction BIA – be given a seat at the table when it comes to the development's site plan control application.

"That will give them input into what this building will actually look like, which I think is very important..."

"The concerns we heard from residents were about the height, the mass, the transition, the materiality, the traffic impact, the environmental sustainability – many of these items we've been able to cover off, and with this amendment, we should get a couple more with the site plan."

Still, some of Doucette's fellow councillors felt her motion didn't go far enough to address the Junction community's concerns about the building and its contrary appearance.

"I will not be supporting this, because this does not suit the Junction. It sticks out like a sore thumb," said Etobicoke North Councillor Rob Ford, who was making his first appearance at EYCC after taking an extended leave for cancer treatment, including surgery to remove a tumour from his abdomen in May.

Despite Ford's objections, Doucette's motion was nonetheless carried – with only councillors Ford, Giorgio Mammoliti (York West), Justin Di Ciano (Etobicoke-Lakeshore), and John Campbell (Etobicoke Centre) opposing it.



Older, Smaller, Better

Measuring how the character of buildings and blocks influences urban vitality

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY MAY 2014



National Trust for Historic Preservation
Preservation Green Lab

www.preservationnation.org/greenlab



THE KRESGE FOUNDATION



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David J. Brown, Executive Vice President and Chief Preservation Officer

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Mariela Alfonzo, Ph.D., Founder

COVER PHOTOS: FOGGY BOTTOM, WASHINGTON, D.C. (LEFT). PHOTO: FLICKR-DEWITA SOEHARJONO. BARRACKS ROW, WASHINGTON, D.C. (RIGHT). CREDIT: BARRACKS ROW MAIN STREET

ABOUT THE PROJECT TEAM AND COLLABORATORS

NATIONAL TRUST FOR HISTORIC PRESERVATION

(www.preservationnation.org)

The National Trust for Historic Preservation is a privately-funded nonprofit organization that works to save America's historic places for the next generation. We are committed to protecting America's rich cultural legacy and to helping build vibrant, sustainable communities that reflect our nation's diversity. We take direct action to save the places that matter while bringing the voices of the preservation movement to the forefront nationally.

PRESERVATION GREEN LAB

(www.preservationnation.org/greenlab)

A department of the National Trust for Historic Preservation, the Preservation Green Lab strengthens the fabric of communities by leveraging the value of existing buildings to reduce resource waste, create jobs, and bolster a strong sense of community. The Preservation Green Lab integrates sustainability with historic preservation by developing research, demonstration projects, and policies that decrease demolition and promote building reuse. Guided by a belief that historic preservation is essential to sustainable development, the Preservation Green Lab works with partners to create new pathways to shared prosperity and to bring people together around a common vision for their neighborhoods, towns, and cities.

IMPRESA, INC.

(www.impresaconsulting.com)

Impresa is a Portland, Oregon-based consulting firm specializing in metropolitan economies and knowledge-based industries. Founded by noted economist Joe Cortright, Impresa's policy advice is built around a proven framework for developing successful urban economies. Impresa developed the Vibrancy Indicators project for ArtPlace America, a collaboration of leading national and regional foundations and financial institutions supporting creative placemaking through grant-making, research, communication, and advocacy.

GEHL STUDIO—A GEHL ARCHITECTS COMPANY

(www.gehlarchitects.com)

Gehl Studio, Inc., a Gehl Architects company, is a dynamic group of talented urbanists from a variety of backgrounds that share the values and ambitions for creating Cities for People around the globe. With offices in New York and San Francisco, Gehl Studio is a networked organization capable of drawing on the experience and talent of its Copenhagen staff to leverage it locally through people that are in tune with the specific needs of a culture and place.

STATE OF PLACE™

(www.urbanimprint.com/about/state-of-place)

State of Place™ is a data-driven, decision-making and community engagement tool to guide investments, interventions, and policies that boost walkability and economic development. Using on-the-ground data covering over 280 built environment features, State of Place™ calculates the State of Place™ Index, an overall walkability score composed of ten urban design dimensions empirically known to impact walking. The Index is visually represented in the State of Place™ Profile, an easy-to-read snapshot of a community's walkability assets and needs. As each dimension is tied to different predicted returns on investment, the State of Place™ Profile produces customized strategic economic development and walkability plans based on communities' performance, goals, and capacity, and allows stakeholders to predict the impact of proposed plans on both State of Place™ and economic performance.

BASEMAP

(basemap.io)

Basemap is a data science and visualization consultancy focused on mapping data in a human context and matching indicators to actions.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

All across America, blocks of older, smaller buildings are quietly contributing to robust local economies and distinctive livable communities. Buildings of diverse vintage and small scale provide flexible, affordable space for entrepreneurs launching new businesses and serve as attractive settings for new restaurants and locally owned shops. They offer diverse housing choices that attract younger residents and create human-scaled places for walking, shopping, and social interaction. These modest, often-overlooked buildings are irreplaceable assets for America's new urban age.

This study demonstrates the unique and valuable role that older, smaller buildings play in the development of sustainable cities. Based upon statistical analysis of the built fabric of three major American cities, this research finds that established neighborhoods with a mix of older, smaller buildings perform better than districts with larger, newer structures when tested against a range of economic, social, and environmental outcome measures.

For generations, planners, preservationists, and community leaders have debated and discussed the importance of retaining older, smaller buildings. Jane Jacobs' 1961 book, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, launched the conversation. Jacobs asserted that urban renewal, which replaced richly textured streets of small, mixed-age buildings with blocks of much larger new structures, drained life from neighborhoods and deadened urban centers. She argued that older buildings provide critical space for entrepreneurial ventures and a healthy mix of local businesses. Today, after decades of advocacy by preservationists and community groups, Jacobs' ideas are widely accepted. Her insights about the contributions of older buildings inform community plans across the country.

The tools for implementing these ideas are not fully developed in many cities, however. Outdated zoning regulations, overly prescriptive building and energy codes, misdirected development incentives, and limited financing tools continue to make it difficult to reuse older structures and to retain the human scale of older blocks and neighborhoods. In addition, and perhaps more significantly, some leading urban thinkers have recently raised fundamental questions about the validity of Jacobs' ideas for today's world. Where do older, smaller buildings fit within cities



Analysis of data from three major American cities shows that areas with a mix of older, smaller buildings perform better than districts with larger, newer structures when tested against a range of economic, social, and environmental outcome measures.

that are seeking to maximize transit investments, increase density, and compete in the global economy? Are the lessons of Jacobs' 1961 book still valid in the 21st century? What have we learned from more than 50 years of experience? What does the growing mountain of data reveal about the contributions of older buildings to successful urban places?

In an effort to answer these questions, the National Trust's Preservation Green Lab mined newly available public and private sources to examine the role that older, smaller buildings play in the context of overall urban development. This research focused on three cities with strong real estate markets and extensive older fabric: San Francisco, Seattle, and Washington, D.C. Looking not just at historically designated or older buildings, but *all* existing structures across these three urban landscapes, the research team empirically documented the age, diversity of age, and size of buildings and statistically assessed the relationships between these characteristics and 40 economic, social, cultural, and environmental performance metrics. Each city was divided into a grid of 200-meter-by-200-meter squares (about one to two square city blocks). Squares composed of commercial and mixed-use areas of the city were analyzed using statistical models, generating "apples to apples" comparisons of results across diverse urban landscapes.



YOUTHFUL CROWD AT A STREET FESTIVAL ON WASHINGTON, D.C.'S HISTORIC H STREET CORRIDOR. Photo: Flickr - Ted Eytan



The research team empirically documented the age, diversity of age, and size of buildings and statistically assessed the relationships between these characteristics and 40 economic, social, cultural, and environmental performance metrics.

KEY RESEARCH FINDINGS

In *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, Jane Jacobs observed that “Cities need old buildings so badly it is probably impossible for vigorous streets and districts to grow without them.”¹ This Preservation Green Lab report provides the most complete empirical validation to date of Jacobs’ long-respected, but largely untested hypothesis: That neighborhoods containing a mix of older, smaller buildings of diverse age support greater levels of positive economic and social activity than areas dominated by newer, larger buildings. These findings support the idea that retaining blocks of older, smaller, mixed-vintage buildings can help cities achieve sustainable development goals and foster great neighborhoods.

Below are insights from this research that demonstrate how the character of buildings and blocks influences urban vitality in some of the nation’s strongest urban real estate markets:

Older, mixed-use neighborhoods are more walkable.

In Seattle and San Francisco, older neighborhoods with a mixture of small, mixed-age buildings have significantly higher Walk Score® rankings and Transit Score® ratings than neighborhoods with large, new buildings.²



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BARRACKS ROW, WASHINGTON, D.C. Photo: Barracks Row Main Street

Young people love old buildings.

In Seattle, San Francisco, and Washington, D.C., the median age of residents in areas with a mix of small, old and new buildings is lower than in areas with larger, predominantly new buildings. These areas are also home to a significantly more diverse mix of residents from different age groups.

Nightlife is most alive on streets with a diverse range of building ages.

San Francisco and Washington, D.C., city blocks composed of mixed-vintage buildings host greater cellphone activity on Friday nights. In Seattle, areas with older, smaller buildings see greater cellphone use and have more businesses open at 10:00 p.m. on Friday.

Older business districts provide affordable, flexible space for entrepreneurs from all backgrounds.

In Seattle and Washington, D.C., neighborhoods with a smaller-scaled mix of old and new buildings host a significantly higher proportion of new businesses, as well as more women and minority-owned businesses than areas with predominantly larger, newer buildings.

The creative economy thrives in older, mixed-use neighborhoods.

In Seattle and Washington, D.C., older, smaller buildings house significantly greater concentrations of creative jobs per square foot of commercial space. Media production businesses, software publishers, and performing arts companies can be found in areas that have smaller-scaled historic fabric.

Older, smaller buildings provide space for a strong local economy.

In Seattle and Washington, D.C., streets with a combination of small, old and new buildings have a significantly higher proportion of non-chain restaurants and retailers, and in Seattle, San Francisco, and Washington, D.C., areas of the city with older, smaller buildings host a significantly higher proportion of jobs in small businesses.

Older commercial and mixed-use districts contain hidden density.

In Seattle, San Francisco, and Washington, D.C., streets with a mix of old and new buildings have greater population density and more businesses per commercial square foot than streets with large, new buildings. In Seattle and Washington, D.C., these areas also have significantly more jobs per commercial square foot.



Smaller buildings and blocks “punch above their weight class” when considering a full spectrum of outcomes on a per-square-foot basis.

PRINCIPLES FOR OTHER CITIES

This report provides new information about the role that blocks of older, smaller buildings can play in the future development of Seattle, San Francisco, and Washington, D.C. The results from these three cities suggest some general planning and development principles that can be applied in other communities as well:

Realize the efficiencies of older buildings and blocks.

This research shows that older, smaller buildings and blocks “punch above their weight class” when considering a full spectrum of outcomes on a per-square-foot basis—from the number of jobs and businesses to the vitality of nightlife and presence of young residents. Older buildings employ time-tested, practical solutions to achieve these efficiencies: mixed daytime and nighttime uses; common entrances and shared services; creative use of small spaces and storage areas; and very little space dedicated for cars. With the new “sharing economy” emerging, older buildings also offer lessons in how to get more round-the-clock performance from our bricks and mortar investments. Codes and regulations can limit these uses, however, and may need to be revised to encourage the efficiencies that older, smaller buildings offer.

Fit new and old together at a human scale.

Findings from the three study cities show that mixing buildings from different vintages—including modern buildings—supports social and cultural activity in commercial and mixed-use zones. Many of the most thriving blocks in the study cities scored high on the diversity of building-age measure. Scale also played an important role. Grid squares with smaller lots and more human-scaled buildings generally scored higher on the performance measures than squares characterized by larger lots and structures. These results support the concept of adding new infill projects of compatible size alongside older buildings.

Support neighborhood evolution, not revolution.

While this research indicates that successful commercial and mixed-use districts benefit from new construction, these changes should be gradual. The rate of change is important. The higher performance of areas containing small-scale buildings of mixed vintage suggests that successful districts evolve over time, adding and subtracting buildings incrementally, rather than comprehensively and all at once.

Steward the streetcar legacy.

Many of the highest performing grid squares in our study cities are commercial areas with buildings that date to the streetcar era. Nearly every American city (and plenty of small towns) once boasted a network of streetcar lines. From the late 1900s until World War II, these lines spurred the construction of neighborhood service centers. Although most streetcar lines are long buried, the commercial districts they created can still be found in urban neighborhoods across the country. Examples of streetcar-era districts from the study cities include Seattle's Pike/Pine Corridor and Washington, D.C.'s H Street NE, which both scored well (and will soon have streetcars again). As cities seek to re-establish transit corridors and foster mixed-use development, the armature of streetcar-era commercial districts provides a head start.

Make room for the new and local economy.

Richard Florida and other scholars have noted that technology start-ups and other creative companies are moving into diverse neighborhoods full of older buildings, such as New York's Silicon Alley, where even former warehouses are small relative to Manhattan buildings overall.³ The *Older, Smaller, Better* research confirms this connection, finding a correlation between a higher concentration of creative jobs and older, smaller-scaled buildings and blocks. These areas also support higher levels of small businesses and non-chain business, helping to keep dollars in the local economy, and providing more resilience against future economic storms.

Make it easier to reuse small buildings.

Vacant and underused buildings are an untapped reservoir of already built density. The *Older, Smaller, Better* research illustrates the value of keeping older, smaller, diverse-age buildings viable and in full use. In some cities, however, older commercial buildings languish, with empty upper floors or vacant storefronts. Cities can help unlock the potential of these spaces by removing barriers, such as outdated zoning codes and parking requirements, and streamlining permitting and approval processes. Targeted incentives and financing programs are also needed to assist small-scale projects.

This study is the first phase of a broader Preservation Green Lab research agenda focused on the role of older buildings in sustainable development. With the help of interested funders, local governments, and partner organizations, our research scope is expanding into additional cities with different economic, social, and physical contexts, including weak real estate markets and high building vacancy rates. The Green Lab's goals are to identify opportunities and to share solutions



Cities can help unlock the potential of these spaces by removing barriers, such as outdated zoning codes and parking requirements, and streamlining permitting and approval processes.

that benefit residents, property owners, investors, and community leaders alike.

The complete *Older, Smaller, Better* report provides more detailed results and recommendations that expand upon the findings and principles discussed in this Executive Summary. The report details the research methodology, statistical modeling results, and mapping analysis, and includes community case studies from the three study cities. Recommendations based upon the research are offered for community leaders, developers, and policymakers, along with directions for future research and empirical investigation.

ABOUT THE PROJECT TEAM

This research was made possible through the generous support of the Summit Foundation, the Prince Charitable Trusts, and the Kresge Foundation. The project was managed and led by the Preservation Green Lab, a department of the National Trust for Historic Preservation that researches the sustainability value of older and historic buildings and identifies policy solutions that help communities leverage their built assets. This project benefitted from collaboration with Impresa, Inc., Gehl Studio, and State of Place™.



Endnotes

1 Jacobs, J. (1961). *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*. New York: Vintage Books.

2 Walk Score® is a Seattle-based company that measures the walkability, bike friendliness, and transit accessibility of neighborhoods across the United States and around the world. It developed three proprietary metrics: the Walk Score® ranking, Bike Score™ index, and Transit Score® rating. A Walk Score® ranking measures the distance someone would have to walk to reach amenities like coffee shops and grocery stores. The Transit Score® rating is based on how well an area is served by public transit. The Bike Score™ index assesses the biking infrastructure, number of bike commuters, and road connectivity associated with addresses throughout the U.S. For more information on Walk Score®, visit www.walkscore.com.

3 For example, see Florida, R. (2012, July 27). "For Creative Cities, the Sky Has Its Limit." *The Wall Street Journal*. Retrieved from <http://online.wsj.com/news/articles/SB10000872396390443477104577551133804551396>



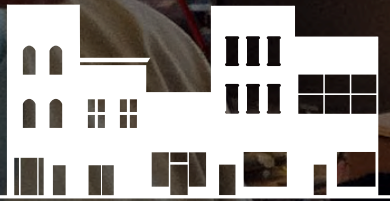
SEATTLE, WA



JOBS PER 1,000 SQ FT

36.8%
MORE
JOBS/SQ FT

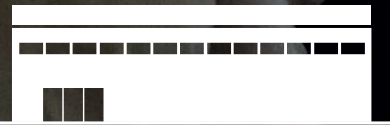
There are more jobs per commercial square foot in areas of Seattle composed of older, smaller, more age-diverse buildings than in areas with mostly newer, larger buildings.



Oldest, most diverse & finest-grained buildings



4.39 jobs



Newest, largest, least age-diverse buildings



3.21 jobs

Photo: Nancy Leson



SEATTLE, WA



BUSINESSES WITH WOMEN OR MINORITY OWNERSHIP

2x
WOMEN AND
MINORITY
OWNERSHIP

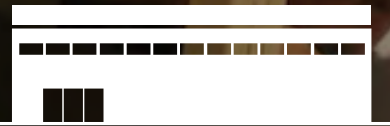
Areas of Seattle with older, smaller, more age-diverse buildings have more than twice the rate found in areas with mostly newer, larger buildings.



Oldest, most diverse & finest-grained buildings



19.2%



Newest, largest, least age-diverse buildings



9.5%

Photo: Flickr user Caffe Vita



WASHINGTON, D.C.



NON-CHAIN LOCAL ESTABLISHMENTS

MORE NON-CHAIN ESTABLISHMENTS

There are significantly more non-chain businesses in areas of Washington, D.C. composed of older, smaller, more age diverse buildings than in areas with mostly newer, larger buildings.



Oldest, most diverse & finest-grained buildings



Newest, largest, least age-diverse buildings



Photo: Flickr user afagen



SAN FRANCISCO, CA



JOBS IN SMALL BUSINESSES

MORE JOBS IN SMALL BUSINESSES

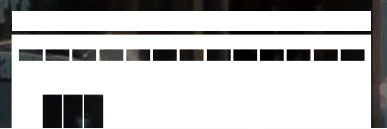
Areas of San Francisco composed of older, smaller, more age-diverse buildings have significantly higher percentages of jobs in small businesses than in areas with mostly newer, larger buildings.



Oldest, most diverse & finest-grained buildings



44.6%



Newest, largest, least age-diverse buildings



34.3%

Photo: Jim Lindberg