



REPORT FOR ACTION

1571 Sandhurst Circle – Initiating a Planning Review of Woodside Square

Date: August 28, 2019

To: Scarborough Community Council

From: Director, Community Planning, Scarborough District

Ward: Ward 23 - Scarborough North

SUMMARY

This report seeks Council direction for City Planning staff to initiate a planning review of lands located at 1571 Sandhurst Circle, also known as Woodside Square.

The subject lands are designated "Special Policy Area" in the Official Plan with a Site and Area Specific Policy (SASP) that requires a planning review be completed to Council's satisfaction prior to allowing any additional uses beyond places of worship and commercial uses.

The existing mall has recently undergone renovations, and an application for expansion of the mall with a new cinema, retail and restaurant uses is currently being reviewed. The landowner has expressed a desire to explore additional development opportunities for the site, including the potential for residential intensification of the lands. The addition of uses beyond the existing permissions presents the need to initiate the planning review consistent with the SASP for the subject site.

Through a thorough public consultation process and comprehensive analysis, the planning review will determine the appropriateness of providing additional land use permissions for the site. The review will also establish the policy framework necessary for implementation of any redevelopment of the subject site.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The City Planning Division recommends that:

1. City Council direct City Planning staff to initiate a planning review for 1571 Sandhurst Circle, as outlined in this report in consultation with the area Councillor and landowner.

FINANCIAL IMPACT

The recommendations in this report have no financial impact.

ISSUE BACKGROUND

Site and Surrounding Context

Since it first opened in 1977, Woodside Square has been expanded twice and has continued to evolve as a retail and commercial centre at the northwest corner of Finch Avenue East and McCowan Road. The site comprises the entire block bound by Finch/McCowan and Sandhurst Circle and is nearly 10 hectares (24.5 acres) in size.

The existing layout of the buildings is generally illustrated in Attachment 1 (Location Map), centrally located on site and surrounding by surface parking areas. The existing mall building is generally one story in height with a limited second story consisting primarily of office use. A stand-alone McDonald's drive through restaurant is located at the southeast corner of the property, at the intersection of McCowan Road and Finch Avenue East. The existing mall building contains 35,166 square metres of commercial space and provides a total of 1,538 parking spaces.

Staff are currently reviewing an application for site plan control approval to add a movie theatre, retail uses and a one storey underground parking garage to the site. The proposed addition is generally located along the west edge of the existing mall building and fronting Sandhurst Circle and adds 11,242 square metres served by 170 underground parking spaces.

Woodside Square is located at the centre of the Agincourt North neighbourhood and serves as the neighbourhood's primary retail and community services hub. The three other corners of the intersection of McCowan Road and Finch Avenue East as well as lands to the west along Finch Avenue east contain high-rise residential buildings surrounded by generous amounts of green space. Albert Campbell Collegiate Institute and Brimwood Junior Public School borders the property at the central portion of Sandhurst Circle on the west. Low-rise residential uses (townhomes) border the northern portion of the site on the opposite side of Sandhurst Circle and McCowan Road.

Official Plan

The subject lands are designated on Official Plan Map 19 as a *Special Policy Area* and subject to Site and Area Specific Policy 236. Pursuant to this SASP, the only permitted uses are "Places of Worship, and commercial uses designed to provide a population of 50,000 to 125,000 within an approximate 4 kilometre radius with a wide range and variety of goods and services, especially comparison shopping goods and services (department store type merchandise)." SASP 236 goes on to state that "No other uses are permitted until a planning review of the area has been completed to Council's satisfaction."

The site is located at the corner of McCowan Road and Finch Avenue East, both identified on Map 3 of the Official Plan as major streets with 36-metre right of ways. Finch Avenue East and McCowan Road south of Finch are also identified as transit priority segments on the Surface Transit Priority Network (Map 5). The site is currently not served by higher order transit; however, McCowan Road may have bus or light rail

rapid transit in the future, as outlined in Metrolinx's 2041 Regional Transportation Plan (2018).

Zoning

The site is zoned Community Commercial (CC) and Place(s) of Worship (PW) in the former City of Scarborough Agincourt North Community Zoning By-law 12797. Community Commercial Zones permit a wide variety of commercial uses, including: auto sales rooms; automobile service stations; banks; business and professional offices; tailor shop and bake shop; frozen food storage and space rental and ancillary retail storage; places of entertainment and recreation; restaurants, cafeterias, tea rooms and taverns; retail stores; service shops and agencies; studios; and day nurseries. In addition, an exception also permits wall signs that are non-accessory.

City of Toronto Zoning By-law No. 569-2013 does not apply to the subject lands but the By-law can be found here: <https://www.toronto.ca/city-government/planning-development/zoning-by-law-preliminary-zoning-reviews/zoning-by-law-569-2013-2/>

COMMENTS

Preliminary Landowner Consultation

Like many mall sites in the Greater Toronto Area, the owner of Woodside Square is seeking to add additional retail and residential uses to intensify the periphery of the property. Currently, the Official Plan and zoning by-laws do not permit residential uses on the subject lands, with the Official Plan requiring a planning review be undertaken before these uses are added to the site.

A pre-application consultation meeting was held on February 26, 2019 where the landowner expressed the desire to reposition the lands to permit additional development. Since then, City staff have met with the applicant on multiple occasions to identify parameters for the proposed planning review, develop a strategy for community engagement, and begin the process of creating block concepts to inform the preparation of a Zoning By-law Amendment application.

Preliminary Community Consultation

In advance of initiating a review, City Planning staff have undertaken initial public outreach to better understand how the mall is used, people's travel experiences accessing the mall, and public perceptions of the mall's strengths and opportunities. Staff held three Planners in Public Spaces (PiPs) events at Woodside Square on July 3rd, 6th, and 11th, 2019 engaging with 230 people over the course of the three days. Three display boards were used to guide conversations and gather responses on the topics noted above.

Mall patrons valued Woodside Square's convenient location and clustering of retail, entertainment, and community services. Community members also indicated that they enjoyed the opportunities for exercise (for example, walking and Tai Chi), as well as the mall's cultural diversity and volume of independent retailers, safe, friendly and

comfortable environment with access to Wi-Fi. Many people emphasized the mall's important function as a cultural and social hub in the community, especially for seniors. Respondents frequently reported visiting the mall multiple times in a week or even daily. A number of respondents interviewed felt a strong sense of community and attachment to the mall.

Respondents also identified many opportunities for improvement. Mall patrons would like to see the mall expanded to offer a greater variety of retail, restaurants, professional and community services and facilities, and entertainment. People also frequently requested more seating areas and gathering places, more green spaces, fitness facilities, and additional community events and exercise activities (e.g. yoga or socacize) in the mall's public spaces. Some people noted that they would like to see even more cultural diversity in the retail offerings. People also requested elevators to improve the physical accessibility of the mall, as currently the second floor is accessible only by stairs. Respondents appreciated the mall's recent and ongoing renovations and requested additional updates to the mall's indoor and outdoor aesthetics.

While some people were satisfied with their travel experience to the mall, valuing the convenient location within walking access from their homes or ample parking, many others identified safety concerns and identified suggestions for improvement to the pedestrian and driving experience. Pedestrians accessing the mall noted that the mall parking lot can be dangerous to navigate and there is a need for safer crossing opportunities both within the mall parking lot and from the roads surrounding the mall, particularly mid-block from the east side of McCowan Road. People travelling by private vehicle to the mall also requested the addition of traffic signals to improve access to the mall, especially from McCowan Road.

Please see Attachment 4 for a more detailed summary of lessons learned from the Planners in Public Spaces events.

Proposed Planning Review Process

It is recommended that staff initiate a planning review of the subject lands as required by SASP 236 to ensure that an appropriate policy framework is in place to provide for the future evolution of Woodside Square. It is important that a vision for the site is developed in consultation with the landowner, community members, and mall patrons to ensure the continued success of the site while providing opportunities for future improvements and redevelopment.

This planning review, led by City staff, is intended to culminate in an Official Plan Amendment for the subject lands. This work would be conducted concurrently with a Zoning By-law Amendment application which is anticipated to be made by the owners of Woodside Square. The analysis will consider Official Plan policies including, but not limited to those pertaining to: Toronto's Economic Health; Building New Neighbourhoods; Built Form; Parks and Open Spaces; Public Realm and Public Art; The Natural Environment; Housing; and Community Services and Facilities.

Through the planning review, strategies and policies would be developed to guide future land use on the subject site. Policies would be developed in consultation with the public

and applicant to inform city building objectives. Preliminary goals of the analysis would include:

- Preserving the function of the site as the retail and community services centre of the Agincourt North community. This could include developing a strategy to ensure the site continues to provide retail, entertainment, professional services, and jobs to serve the local community and contribute to a complete community.
- Determining the appropriateness of new uses, including residential and additional commercial retail uses, and the level of intensification that the site can accommodate.
- Identifying appropriate built form typologies, building heights and densities for new land uses.
- Securing a network of streets, blocks, and active (pedestrian and cycling) connections to improve multi-modal access within the site as well as to and from the surrounding community.
- Improving the safety and travel experience of all transportation network users (pedestrians, cyclists, public transit users and drivers) accessing the site.
- Reducing parking demand through transportation demand management (TDM) measures and ensuring that any new parking facilities are adaptable to changing parking demands in the future.
- Emphasizing the importance of the northwest corner of Finch Avenue East and McCowan Road given two transit priority corridors meet at this intersection.
- Identifying the appropriate location of public parkland and publicly accessible open spaces to provide recreational opportunities and support an attractive, vibrant, and robust public realm.
- Should residential uses be recommended, developing a housing strategy that provides for a range of household types, including families with children, seniors, and affordable housing consistent with Official Plan policies for large sites.
- Ensuring adequate servicing infrastructure and capacity (water mains, storm sewers and sanitary sewers) including required municipal infrastructure upgrades necessary to support future growth.
- Securing sustainable design measures to reduce the environmental impacts of development.
- Developing a phasing strategy to ensure orderly development, having regard to early implementation of infill development on the existing surface parking lot that will not inhibit future comprehensive redevelopment of the site should the mall building be removed in favour of comprehensive redevelopment at some point in the future.

Future Community Consultation

Public consultation moving forward would initially include an open house in the fall of 2019, following receipt of Block Context Plan and/or a rezoning application from the applicant. The goals listed above would be presented to the public at this open house for comment. Should there be sufficient interest at the open house, a local advisory group would be formed to provide ongoing community input at key junctures in the planning review process. High school students are regular mall users, especially because of the location of Albert Campbell Collegiate opposite the mall site. Planning staff will endeavor to incorporate youth engagement into the consultation process

through outreach in partnership with the high school. Information about the planning review will also be made available on the City's website.

Where appropriate, engagement on the planning review and Official Plan amendment will be coordinated with community engagement on the anticipated Zoning By-law amendment application. Applicant-led engagement strategies (which are still under development) may include mall tenant engagement, targeted stakeholder meetings with local residents associations (Brimley Forest Community Association, Richmond Park Community Association, Rosewood Ratepayer's Association, and other groups as needed), a survey, youth engagement, and a project website. Joint engagement events will give the community an opportunity to provide feedback on the Official Plan and Zoning By-law amendment processes at the same time.

Conclusion

The proposed planning review presents an opportunity to assess the merits of how additional uses might be accommodated at 1571 Sandhurst Circle, while establishing policies that would secure improvements to the important existing community commercial functions of the site. It is recommended that City Council direct staff to initiate the review to begin the analysis and community consultation necessary to ensure that a policy framework is in place that will guide the future evolution of Woodside Square.

CONTACT

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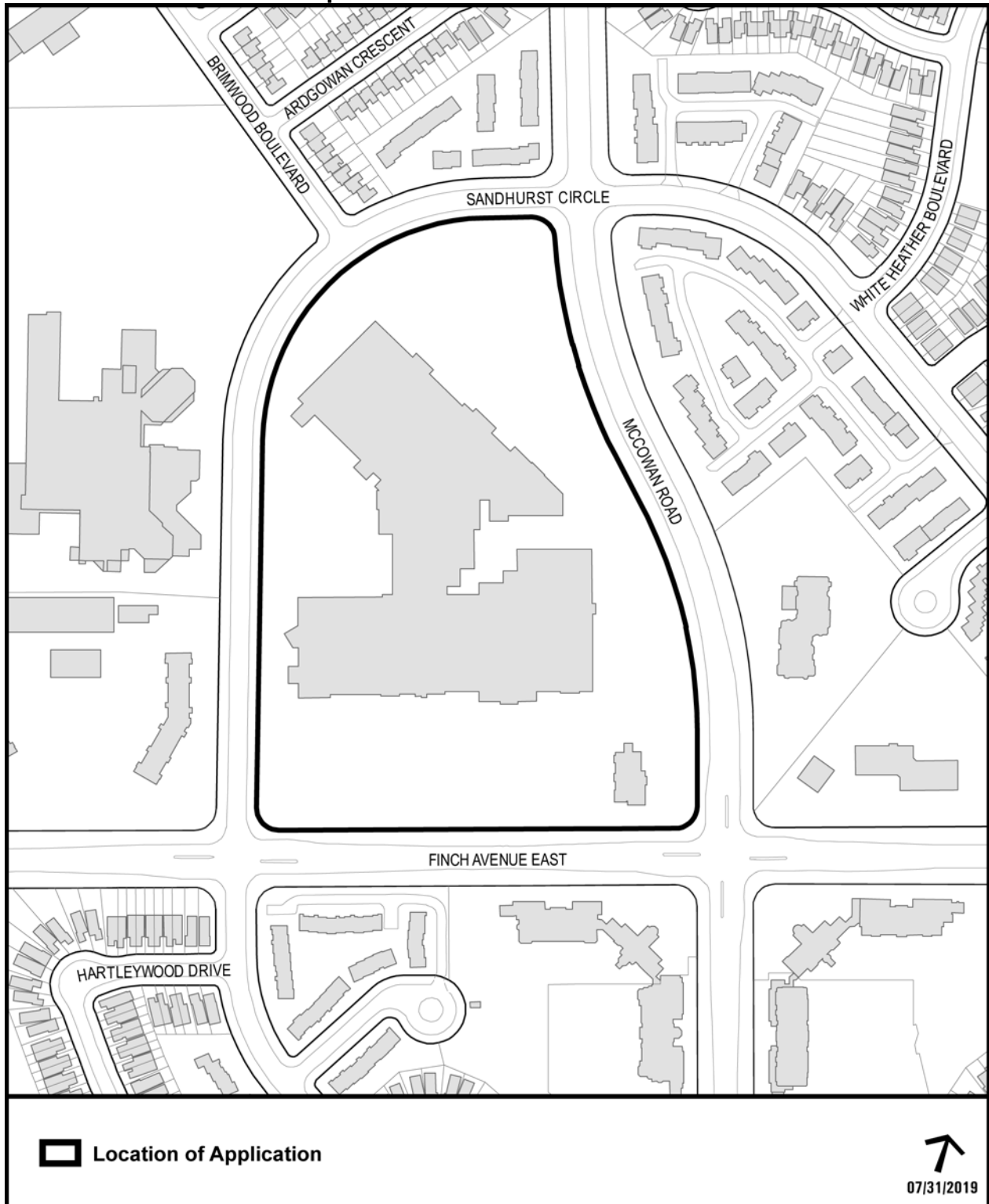
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Paul Zuliani, Director
Community Planning, Scarborough District

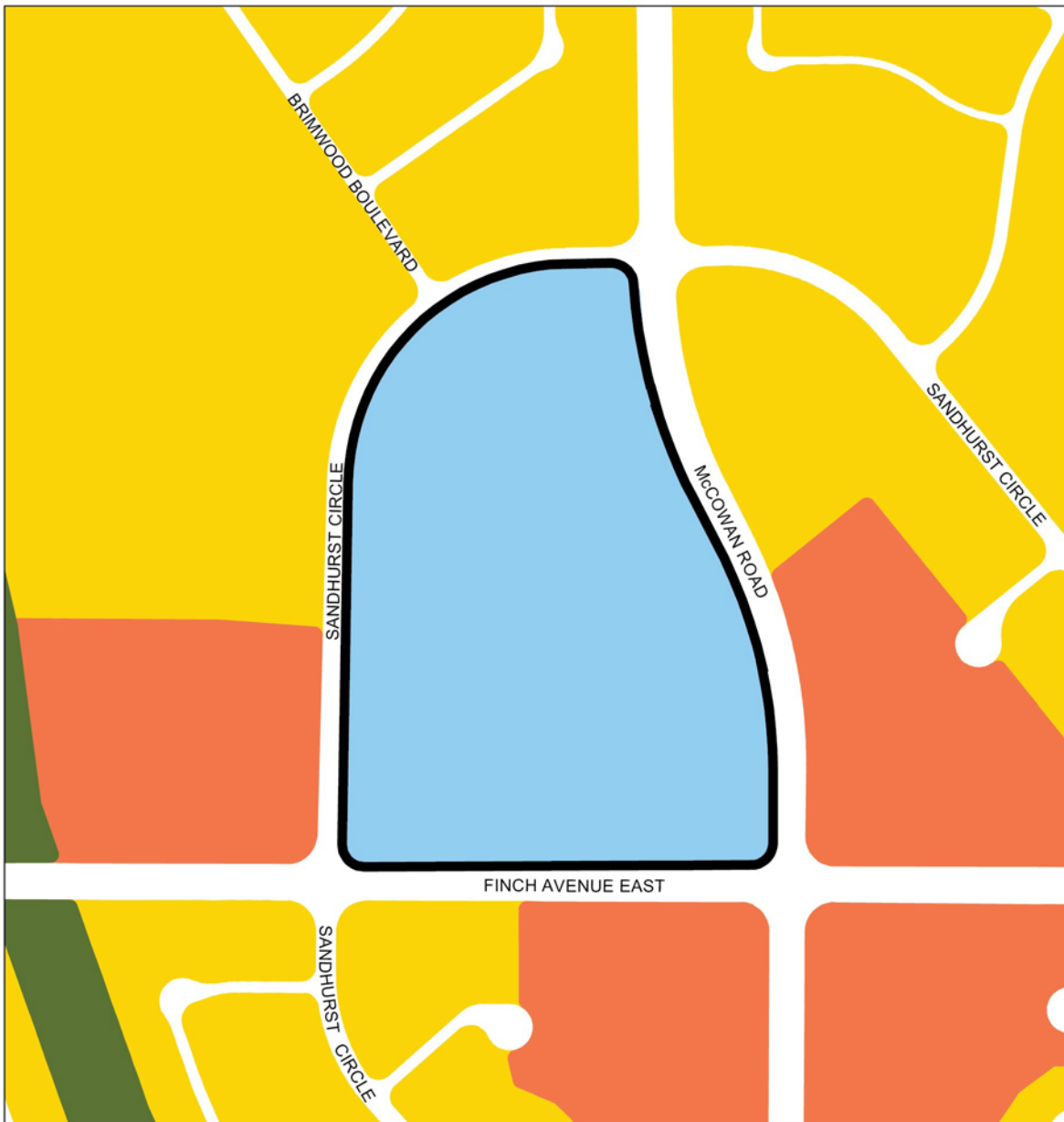
ATTACHMENTS

Attachment 1: Location Map
Attachment 2: Official Plan Map
Attachment 3: Existing Zoning Map
Attachment 4: Planners in Public Spaces Events At Woodside Square: Lessons Learned

Attachment 1: Location Map



Attachment 2: Official Plan Map



 **TORONTO**
Official Plan Land Use Map #19

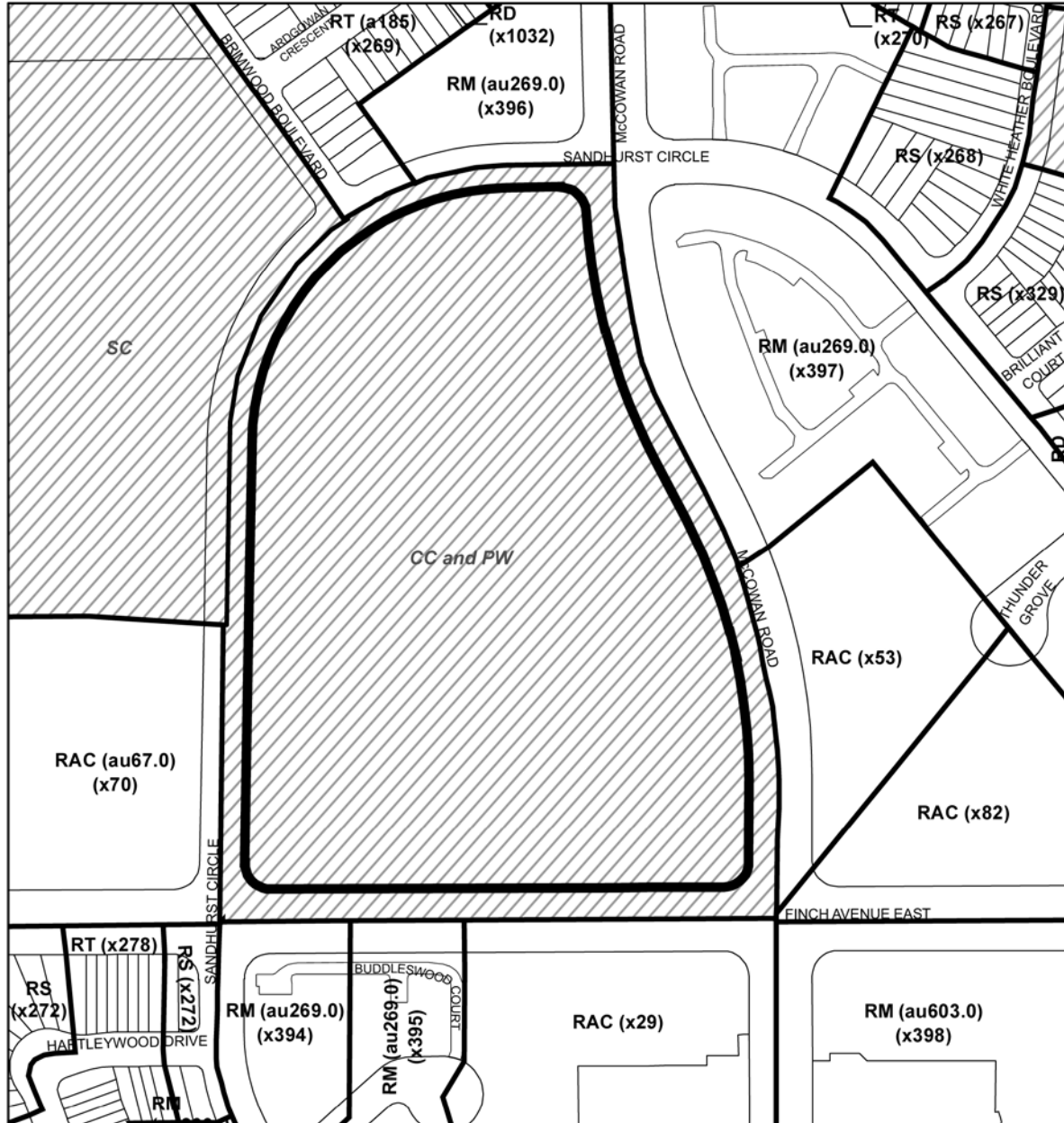
1571 Sandhurst Circle

File # 19 182375 ESC 23 TM




Not to Scale
7/31/2019

Attachment 3: Existing Zoning Map



Zoning By-law 569-2013

1571 Sandhurst Circle

File # 19 182375 ESC 23 TM

Location of Application

See Former City of Scarborough Agincourt North Community By-law No. 12797

RD Residential Detached
 RS Residential Semi-Detached
 RT Residential Townhouse
 RM Residential Multiple
 RAC Residential Apartment Commercial

SC School
 CC and PW Community Commercial, Place(s) of Worship

Not to Scale
 Extracted: 07/31/2019

Attachment 4:

PLANNERS IN PUBLIC SPACES EVENTS AT WOODSIDE SQUARE: LESSONS LEARNED

Summary

Planners in Public Spaces events were held inside Woodside Square in order to better understand how the mall is used, people's travel experiences accessing the mall, and public perceptions of the mall's strengths and opportunities. The three sessions were held in the common areas of the mall during one weekday afternoon and evening and a Saturday afternoon on the following days:

- Wednesday July 3, 11:30 a.m.-3:00 p.m.
- Saturday July 6, 11:30 a.m.-3:30 p.m.
- Thursday July 11, 4:45 p.m.-7:30 p.m.

Planners engaged a total of 230 people over the course of the three sessions, including groups of people such as families and friends visiting together. Three City Planning staff attended each event. In response to the high prevalence of Mandarin and Cantonese in the neighbourhood and among mall patrons, service in these languages was made available throughout most of the engagement sessions.

Three display boards collected responses, including: travel mode and trip distance to the mall, reasons for visiting Woodside Square and other community destinations, and what people like about Woodside Square and want to see changed in the future.

Accessing Woodside Square

The first board asked about people's journeys to Woodside Square, including: "Where did you travel from?", "How did you get here?", and "How was your experience accessing the mall?"

- *Mode share and distance travelled*

Ninety-eight trips were captured in the survey by mode and starting location. Overall mode share was divided 56% by private vehicle (including driving, drop-offs from family and taxis), 35% by foot, 6% by bus, and 3% by bicycle.

Nearly half (42/98 or 43%) of trips originated from within 800 metres of the site. For those trips, a strong majority of journeys (32/42 or 76%) were taken by foot. The majority of trips taken from further than 800 metres were taken by private vehicle (48/55 or 87%). Half of the bus trips captured (3/6) were from people travelling a distance greater than 4 kilometres.

Journeys greater than 4 kilometres tended to be from people who either worked in the mall or used to live in the neighbourhood and returned to Woodside Square to access a specific service, such as their bank branch or dentist, or because they felt a special affinity for the place.

- *Mode choice*

A number of respondents explained that they either drive or walk depending on the weather, other destinations in their day, and their anticipated volume of purchases. The weather on all three days was sunny and warm. Some people mentioned that they frequently walk to the mall, but drove that day because of the heat.

People who took the bus to the mall reported positive bus experiences; however, cost was cited as a deterrent to taking public transit, including additional walking to avoid TTC fare increases on routes running into Markham.

It appears that very few people cycle to the mall but it was noted that more people might consider cycling to the mall if dedicated cycling infrastructure (bike lanes) and more bicycle parking was provided on site.

- *Travel experience*

While many people expressed satisfaction with their travel experience accessing the mall, citing convenience due to a short walk from home or ample parking, others identified areas for improvement.

Safety concerns accessing the mall were frequently raised by respondents and were the most common type of travel experience feedback. The intersection of McCowan Road and Finch Avenue was identified as particularly challenging for all transportation modes due to long crossing distances and left-turning vehicles.

Pedestrian safety accessing the mall was raised repeatedly as a concern, both in terms of crossing the major streets surrounding the mall and navigating the parking lot. The public streets surrounding the mall lack safe crossing opportunities for pedestrians and cyclists, particularly along McCowan Road. Many pedestrians accessing the mall from the north use Brimwood Boulevard and cross Sandhurst Circle at the stop-controlled intersection. People requested safer mid-block crossing options on all sides of the mall, and noted that there are frequently pedestrians crossing midblock along Sandhurst Circle.

Crossing the surface parking lot on foot presents a range of safety issues, such as vehicles moving too quickly, inattentive drivers, and potholes. Respondents requested better pedestrian connections within the site to access the mall.

Reasons for Visiting Woodside Square and Other Community Destinations

The second board asked two questions: "What brought you to Woodside Square today?" and "Where do you go for various things in the community?" Response options included community services, eating, entertainment, park, shopping, socializing and work.

- *Diversity of uses and activities*

The top reason why people came to Woodside Square was to shop (63), followed by eating (35), community services – primarily the public library (31), and to socialize (25). Fourteen (14) people interviewed came to Woodside Square for work, and five (5) people visited Woodside Square for entertainment.

Banking was a popular reason for visiting the mall. At least 16 people mentioned that banking was one of the reasons for their visit. The mall offers three banks.

The mall serves as a community and cultural hub. In particular, it attracts many seniors who use the mall as part of their daily routine. Many users – including families, singles, groups of friends, and seniors – explained that they come to the mall every day or several times in a week for a variety of reasons, such as to do their weekly shopping, visit the library, meet friends over a coffee or a bite to eat, and so on.

- *Exercise*

Some people value the mall for exercise, either by working it into their walking routine as a destination or appreciate the space to walk in the comfort of an indoor, climate-controlled, and safe environment. Tai Chi is a popular morning activity, which takes place informally during weekday mornings between 7:00 and 9:00 am.

- *Other community amenities*

In addition to Woodside Square, other commercial destinations included Alton Towers Plaza, Scarborough Town Centre, Chartwell Mall, Finch-Midland Centre, and Walmart (both at Steeles and Markham or Kennedy and Sheppard).

Milliken Park was the most popular park destination amongst respondents. Other parks, trails, and green spaces within approximately two kilometres which respondents visited for recreation included Brimley Woods, East Highland Creek Watercourse, Scarborough Hydro Green Space, Richmond Park, Chartwell Park, and Alex Muir Park. One respondent, a child, cited the private green space and playground by his apartment building as his primary recreation opportunity.

For sports and recreation, some families mentioned that they travelled north to Markham or south to Scarborough Town Centre to access a YMCA. Other destinations for families included L'Amoreaux Community Recreation Centre and Kidstown Water Parks. A few respondents mentioned their desire for a community centre or a senior's centre, such as a YMCA, in the neighbourhood as well as parks improvements and more places for children to play.

Woodside Square Attributes and Opportunities

The third board asked two questions: "What do you like about Woodside Square?" and "What would you like to see changed?"

What people like about Woodside Square:

- *Proximity and convenient access to retail, professional and community services, and entertainment*

People appreciated the convenience of the mall due to its location close to their homes as well as the clustering of shops (especially those that meet day-to-day needs like pharmacies and groceries), restaurants, professional services (dentist, barber, optometrist), and community services (library, newcomers services) in one place. Many people liked the considerable size of the mall, and some compared it to a condensed, convenient version of Scarborough Town Centre.

- *Comfortable, friendly, familiar environment*

People praised the mall for its safe, friendly, comfortable and familiar environment. Many liked the low-key, community-oriented aspect of the mall. A number of people mentioned that they liked that they knew the shop keepers in certain stores and services they frequented, and the shop keepers knew them. One person praised the mall's security which they felt contributed to the mall's safe environment. The mall's indoor, climate-controlled environment was a noted attraction, especially given the hot weather. People also appreciated the mall's recent renovations to upgrade the building's interior aesthetics.

Some seniors shared that they liked the opportunity to be in the company of other seniors, and noted that Woodside Square is an important senior's hub. Many respondents felt a strong sense of ownership and community in the mall and shared that they feel at home here.

A number of respondents explained that they have been coming to the mall for a long time, sometimes decades, and that they feel a deep connection to Woodside Square. One person proudly explained, "This is my mall."

- *Vibrancy*

Mall patrons and business owners both spoke about liking the vibrancy and high amount of foot traffic in the mall. At least two retailers identified the high volume of foot traffic as a deciding factor in choosing to locate their businesses at Woodside Square.

- *Social gathering opportunities*

People spoke about how they value the mall's role as a cultural and social hub and community gathering place. Some respondents commented that they valued Woodside Square as a place where they get to see their neighbours. Many

people come to the mall to socialize with friends over a bit to eat or a coffee. They appreciated the mall's seating areas and food court for informal gathering and socializing and enjoyed the community activities at the mall – both informal activities, such as Tai Chi, and formal events, such as the mall's Dragon Festival. One person remarked that they liked recognizing their neighbours at the mall.

- *Cultural diversity and uniqueness*

The cultural diversity and unique, independent shops were prized by many. Respondents named the good Chinese and Indian restaurants as well as the cinema, which plays Tamil movies, as anchors in supporting this cultural diversity.

What people want to see changed:

What people requested most was the expansion and enhancement of those attributes which they already value and seek out at Woodside Square.

- *Larger mall with more retail choices, professional and social services, entertainment, offices, and gathering opportunities*

Many people wished that the mall would expand to be bigger so that it could contain a greater variety and quantity of offerings – restaurants, community services, professional services such as lawyers and medical facilities, offices, entertainment, clothing stores, and grocery options. In order to provide this additional space, some respondents suggested that the mall should add a full second floor.

While many people highly value the mall's independent retailers, there were some requests for the addition of more "big box stores" and additional supermarket options for food and groceries.

- *More community service, recreation and exercise opportunities*

Respondents also requested community services for seniors and newcomers. (It is not known whether these respondents were aware of the existing newcomer services offered at the Centre for Immigrant and Community Services.)

People also offered suggestions for additional programming at the library, such as arts, lectures, financial literacy talks, and gardening.

A number of people requested additional recreation and exercise facilities at Woodside Square, both formal fitness centres and additional public exercise events in the mall's common areas, such as yoga and socasize (exercise class combining Caribbean and African dance movements).

There were also a number of requests for additional places for children to play. One child requested a place where he could play while his parents are shopping.

- *Additional opportunities for social and community gathering*

Many people requested more public seating areas, and more places to play, eat and relax with friends.

People also requested additional events and activities to bring people together. Ideas suggested included environmental days where local students could play leadership roles, craft events for children, and events for newcomers to learn about services available through the Community Immigrant Service Centre.

- *Site and building improvements*

There is a need to improve physical accessibility of the building, as there is currently no elevator access to the second floor, which hosts professional and community services, such as the Centre for Immigration and Community Services, a dental surgeon, and the mall's offices. This was noted as a priority given the high volume of seniors who use the mall.

One person remarked that the Finch/Sandhurst corner feels "empty" and hoped there could be better pedestrian connections from the periphery of the property to the mall. Respondents also frequently requested improvements to the pedestrian and vehicular travel experience to and within the site, which are included in the earlier Board 1 summary on Accessing Woodside Square.

While respondents acknowledged the recent mall upgrades, some people requested further upgrades and modernization of the mall's aesthetics, such as improved lighting in the food court, expansion and renovation of the washroom areas, and improvements to the building's façade to make it more attractive.

- *Comments on potential changes through redevelopment*

The Planners in Public Spaces displays did not solicit input on potential redevelopment of the mall site. However, when people inquired, staff explained that the landowner could explore changes to the mall site which includes the additional of residential uses.

Comments on potential changes were limited but focussed on concerns that potential redevelopment of the mall lands would result in the loss of the community/cultural hub character currently defining the mall. Others expressed concern that intensification of the site would result in increased vehicular traffic on the mall lands as well as the surrounding area, creating safety issues.

People acknowledged that the retail business is evolving and suggested ways to continue to animate the mall through fun activities and events in order to sustain foot traffic in the age of online shopping.

Some people felt positively about potential addition of housing on the mall site and wanted to see more development and green spaces in the area, noting that additional supply could help to make housing more affordable. One person suggested that a mixture of densities such as towers and townhouses would be appropriate. It was noted that there is a need for more housing for elders, and it was suggested that incorporating health care, personal services and retail within the lower three floors of a residential building could be a good fit for the clientele that currently use Woodside Square.