

Bloor-Dundas 'Avenue' Study Open House Meeting #4

Date & Time: January 26, 2009 @ 6:30 pm
Location: High Park Baptist Church – Lower Auditorium (9 Hewitt Avenue)
Attendance: Approximately 80 members of general public
Councillor Gord Perks, Shana Almeda
City Staff: Corwin Cambray, Kevin Edwards, Andrea Old
Consultant Team: Anne McIlroy, Shawna Bowen & Shima Mirkarimi, Brook
McIlroy Planning & Urban Design/Pace Architects

1. Introduction

On Monday, January 26, 2009, the City of Toronto, in conjunction with the consulting team of Brook McIlroy Planning + Urban Design, hosted an Open House in the Lower Auditorium of High Park Baptist Church for the Bloor-Dundas 'Avenue Study'. This was the fourth meeting in a series of meetings as part of the Bloor-Dundas 'Avenue' Study, Public Engagement Process.

1.2 Purpose

To present refinements to the draft recommendations based on feedback from the public open house on November 18, 2008, and provide an opportunity for further community discussion and feedback on the Avenue Study directions, including examples of built form scenarios for sites and sub-areas.

The meeting started with an open house at 6:30 p.m. providing an opportunity to review information boards, ask questions and provide comments. A presentation followed at 7:15 p.m. The information boards were posted on the study's web page on Wednesday, January 21, 2009 to facilitate community feedback.

1.3 Attendees

Over 80 people attended the meeting including residents, property and business owners, representatives of community groups and members of the Local Advisory Committee (LAC). The meeting was also attended by the Ward Councillor, Gord Perks, and Shana Almeda from the Councillor's office.

1.4 What was Presented?

Councillor Gord Perks and Corwin Cambray, Senior Planner with the City gave an introduction to the Study, summarizing the process to-date and what to expect as the Study moves forward. A presentation by Brook McIlroy Planning & Urban Design followed. The agenda of the presentation included a discussion of the following topics:

1. Overview of Consultation
2. Planning Framework
3. Key Community Directions
4. Key Recommendations by Precinct
5. opportunity sites
6. The Avenue Study

The presentation is posted under the “Community Meeting – Monday, January 26, 2009” section on the study’s web page at www.toronto.ca/planning/bloordundas.htm

2.0 Community Input / Q & A Summary

The presentation was followed with an opportunity for questions and comments from the attendees. The following is a summary of the questions and comments raised during the presentation, and answers when applicable.

Q1a: How did you come up with the population per number of units? Are they the same for all the scenarios?

A1a: The ratios used to calculate the population based on the number of units is from the 2006 Statistics Canada data. They are as follows:

- Apartment, duplex = 2.83 people per unit
- Apartment, building that has five or more storeys = 2.11 people per unit
- Apartment, building that has fewer than five storeys = 2.15 people per unit
- Employment ratios = 250 sq.ft. per employee/office & 500 sq.ft. per employee/retail

(The number of units was calculated based on the gross building area divided by an average unit size of 100 square metres)

Q1b: Do we have similar numbers for the GTA?

A1b: No

Q2: The opportunity site at Bloor Street West and Keele Street is shown as “up to 15 storeys” on the boards. Will it be in writing in the final report that only elements of the development can be 15 storeys?

A2: Corner sites that can accommodate the extra height have been identified, including Bloor Street West and Keele Street. All recommendations will be explained in detail in the report, including where this height is appropriate.

Q3: There is a strong desire to keep the gas station where it is (northeast corner of Bloor Street West and Keele Street) but your diagram overrides that. Can we keep it?

A3: Lots of people see the gas station as an essential service. The plans do not override the desire for it to be kept. Because this is a major intersection, we want to anticipate what its potential is over the long term. If the gas station isn’t needed in this location in 20-30 years, for example, then the site could accommodate this type of building/massing.

At the start of the study Petro Canada contacted the City and advised that they have no desire to move, as this location is one of their most profitable in the downtown and they made a large investment on this site not too long ago. But the City has to be prepared that in the future the site may not be desirable as a gas station any longer.

Q4: There are a few things I do not agree with in the Key Community Directions: You speak about affordable and family-oriented housing but what you have proposed is not in keeping with that. These mid-rise buildings with retail on the ground floor, office space on the second and third floors and residential above are not appropriate as family units. At the last meeting some people expressed a desire for the Loblaw’s site to be all townhouses, but we don’t see that reflected in any of the options presented tonight.

A4: Both options for the Loblaw's site have a low-rise edge and have multiple opportunities for "front door units" which are considered "family-oriented". We have also heard from the community meetings that it's important for buildings facing onto Dundas Street West to have a retail / employment edge, as it would help to create a vibrant streetscape and better connect Bloor Street West and Dundas Street West to Roncesvalles Avenue. As you move further into the site, there are more family-oriented buildings. We think it is important to illustrate the potential for a range of building types and uses.

Q4b: The mixed-use buildings with retail and office space on the first two storeys and residential on top go against all the criteria of family housing.

A4b: We are showing both types of built form. Some buildings are all residential on the interior portions of the Loblaw's site while others have a mix of uses.

Q5: If you thought the gas station at Bloor Street West and Keele Street would be there for many years and that there is a possibility that they would not be able to consolidate the adjacent lots then why not show us an option based on those realities?

A5: If in the future, the lands were consolidated and the owners were to express development interest, the City wants to be proactive about what this important corner will look like.

Q6: Could we look at a sub-option for opportunity site #1, which considers the gas station staying and only the strip plaza redeveloped?

A6: Yes, we can do that.

Q7: What is the status of the Giraffe development (1540 Bloor Street West)? In your presentation the building on that site is 15 storeys. They are proposing something much higher.

A7: The City has raised a number of concerns, such as access, scale and shadow impacts, regarding this development. The developer is working at their response to these concerns. The City is currently working on a Staff Report for this development.

Q8: Does the City have any idea about the TTC's future planning projects? Has there been any talk about building on top of the subway stations (Keele or Dundas West)?

A8: In some of the City's negotiations for the Giraffe, the City asked the developers to look at building on top of the TTC station but because of the way the tunnel and station operates it would take a lot to structurally anchor the building and the cost would be prohibitive. The developer would essentially have to building four 20-storey buildings to cover the cost of building on top of the TTC Station.

Q9: The opportunity site boundaries at the northwest corner of Bloor Street West and Dundas Street West are not the same as for the Giraffe development. Could you show an option with the existing site boundaries and no consolidation?

A9: Yes, we can consider that.

Q10a: The opportunity sites appear where there are currently churches. Could you please clarify how you picked these sites?

A10a: At the start of the process the community was asked to identify opportunity sites. The St. Joan of Arc church was one of the sites the community asked us to take a closer look at, to consider if they were to redevelop at some point. The other site was the Budget Rental site and the Jehovah's Witness temple on Dundas Street West and Chelsea Avenue.

Opportunity sites were also analyzed based on their physical dimensions, for example, are they deep enough and wide enough to accommodate a mid-rise building?

Q10b: It appears that all the opportunity sites were picked based on the idea that people will stop going to churches or they will stop driving. How realistic is that?

A10b: We've seen former churches in the city being sold to developers and being converted into lofts or torn down. The same thing could happen to these sites.

Q11: What impact does this study have on future sites?

A11: An Avenue Study helps support the City's position on future applications. It indicates a strong and comprehensive community consultation process on the part of the City, which helps greatly at the Ontario Municipal Board.

Collectively we have a better chance of dealing with new development where an Avenue Study is in place. It is important to note that a lot of the opportunity sites are sites that might stay in their current use/configuration for a long time.

Q12: The RFP requested skills to implement mid-rise development in the area before any community input. No surprise then that mid-rise buildings are being proposed. There is a potential loss of tenant housing. The existing stores on the Loblaw's site provide important services for the neighbourhood and if you get rid of them, where will people go to take care of their basic needs? Similarly, the warehouses north of Bloor are well used and their redevelopment would replace affordable with costly space.

A12: The Avenue Study process is to create a framework so that development is not dealt with in a "piecemeal" process. It's a comprehensive public process to hear from you. It is not realistic to expect only one type of building or low-rise buildings. There will be a number of building types. The day-to-day services that Loblaw's and Zellers provide are important for the community and will be encouraged to be retained within the community through redevelopment.

Q13: My concern is with the massing of the buildings on the Loblaw's site. The proposed buildings located in the southern most portion of the site are right beside 2-storey buildings and are too tall for that context. You should consider buildings that are a maximum of 5-storeys. How did you come up with the 2.5 and 2.7 density numbers?

What is the density in other parts of the city, such as St. James Town or Liberty Village and how does it compare to the Loblaw's site. We need to see examples of other comparable precedents to what you proposed.

A13: The exercise for the Loblaw's demonstration plans started by looking at an appropriate built form, not a density number. The gross density is simply a result of the massing shown on the demonstration plans. Once the roads and the 30-meter setback from the railway, the allowable building area is quite low.

The density of St. Lawrence is around 2.7. Liberty Village is a large area with many existing warehouse-style buildings and is zoned industrial, so it is not comparable.

What we have been hearing through the Public Open Houses is that everyone expects the Loblaw's site to deliver a lot of things: a range of building forms, at-grade entrance, large public green or open spaces, retail uses, etc. In order to achieve these things on this site, there will have to be some trade-offs with height and densities on the site. The demonstration plans consider how the buildings, open spaces and roads can be configured on the site and what the resulting built form is. It would be unrealistic to expect a developer to deliver public amenities without achieving a certain density.

Comment: The southeast corner of the Loblaw's site needs to be considered carefully as it will directly impact the neighbourhood south of the site. The Official Plan addresses impacts on adjacent neighbourhoods and the importance of protecting them. We are fine with the low-end of mid-rise, for example, 5-storeys or less. South of the new east-west street should be no more than 3-storeys.

Comment: Thank you for an excellent presentation. There are lots of good ideas here. We should increase the potential for public space on the Loblaw's site. A third demonstration plan could show more publicly-accessible open space, not contained within courtyards to buildings.

Comment: We live on Golden Avenue. We appreciate the previous suggestions about lowering the building heights on the Loblaw's site closer to the residential buildings to the south. We'd like to also see the green space moved next to the residential neighbourhood instead of the school.

Q14: What about the "roadscape"? Have you given it much thought?

A14: The Bloor Street West right-of-way (R.O.W.) and streetscape has been dealt with comprehensively during most of the previous Public Open Houses. We have spent a lot of time discussing it and there has been general consensus on the direction for these, which is why it has not been discussed again tonight.

Q15: I live in a house south of the Loblaw's site. With all the new roads that connect to the existing residential streets, it seems like a lot of traffic will come through the Loblaw's site.

A15: There are streets traversing the site, but we have not determined whether they will be one-way streets, reduced lanes, etc. It is important that this site be integrated into the community and not be "land-locked". A detailed traffic analysis is required when a development application is brought forward for this site.

Q16: The rear lane behind the proposed building on opportunity site #6 is extremely narrow. The shadow from that building will not be contained within the site and will affect the neighboring houses.

A16: The MCR zoning requires a 7.5 meter rear setback. However, there may be some incremental shadowing to the north and on the east and west side and on Dundas Street West.

Q17: What will the traffic patterns be like? Will there be underground parking? Will there be a light at Loblaw's?

A17: There will be exits and entrances for parking and there will have to be consideration for a traffic light at the entrance to the Loblaw's site. Once we generate the unit counts and population numbers, Nick Poulos from Poulos + Chung Transportation Engineers (part of the Consultant Team) will look at the scenarios in terms of impact. All of the opportunity sites assume below-grade parking.

Q18: What is the rear setback? The Chelsea Avenue site is not very large.

A18: It is 7.5 metres from the rear property line, and this may include a laneway.

Q19: I have a question about the site at Alhambra Avenue and Bloor Street West - the lane runs east-west here. Is the building shown right next to the lane? And is the City suggesting that they tear down building for that property?

A19: The two houses on the flanking street are zoned as MCR (Mixed Commercial Residential) and therefore part of the Avenue Study. With an MCR zoning, these sites could already be developed as mixed-use buildings. There are very few instances within the Study Area where this happens, but it does happen sometimes. Based on the existing zoning a developer could redevelop these properties today or consolidate them with the properties fronting Bloor Street West.

Q20: It seems best to anticipate the worst case scenario. It would be productive to talk to the owners of the Loblaw's site before they propose a development scenario, like what has happened at 1540 and 1638 Bloor Street West.

A20: Loblaw's has been invited and have attended meetings. The Councillor's office calls them every 6 months to see what their immediate plans are and each time we call they have said that they are not moving yet. The Councillor's office wants to start the conversation with the developers before the application comes through. And this has been possible in the past.

Q21: Congratulations to the planning team. The identified opportunity sites have been identified and discussed. I understand that these sites may come into the market eventually but what if another site comes up. Will it be harder to apply those rules on these non opportunity sites?

A21: The report will have regulations that guide development throughout the rest of the Study Area. We are using opportunity sites to test out these scenarios.

Q22: With respect to Dundas Street West north of Bloor Street West, rather than setting back the buildings to create wider sidewalks the extra space should be taken from the existing road space. This will create a narrower street and will help slow down traffic and prevent cars from racing through this area.

A22: That is something we could ask the City's transportation staff to consider.

Q23: Which sites have been approved so far?

A23: Two sites have been approved so far: 1638 Bloor Street West (northwest corner of Bloor Street West and Indian Road) and 2376-2388 Dundas Street West (north of the Crossways Mall).

Comment: To have an 8-storey property adjacent to the existing neighbourhood would ruin the fabric of the street – particularly at Alhambra Avenue.

Follow-up: Do you have a sense intuitively of what height you could see at that site?

A: Anything beyond 4 storeys would be too high.

Comment: No matter what you want to do, if Loblaw's doesn't come through nothing will develop on that site. There are some things that can happen fairly quickly though, like the TTC station that could be improved. There is already a 30-storey building. Surprised that nothing is happening to the TTC station, especially with the potential Giraffe development. Bloor Street West and Dundas Street West is a speed trap, and it's a good idea to narrow the street.

Q24a: Tonight we've seen a number of proposals and we've heard comments from people that disagree with proposal. We're not ready for a final report without bringing it back to another meeting.

A24a: When report is written you have a chance to make comments. You still have time to provide comments about this meeting until mid-February.

It is important to note that the consultants provide their report to Staff; Staff then take their own report to Community Council. At that point anyone can come and make a presentation in front of Community Council.

Q24b: A lot of people do not feel comfortable making a presentation in front of Community Council.

A24b: The Councillor and Corwin are available to discuss the Study with any individual who does not feel comfortable making a presentation.

Q24c: We are not ready to move the process over to the City Staff. We need another meeting.

A24c: We could have another meeting but we can not bring back the consultants. At some point we need to get comments from you. There have already been numerous meetings.

Q25: Why is the Lutheran Church not an opportunity site?

A25: It wasn't identified by the community and people felt there was the heritage character of the green space and building should be retained.

Comment: The street configuration in Precincts 3 and 4 appears to be a suburban cul-de-sac. New streets should connect to existing streets, so that the new communities are integrated, rather than creating "closed" communities" that are isolated through a single access roadwork. Safety may be compromised with dead-end streets. This is especially a concern for women. Single points of access on Dundas Street West should be avoided. In Precinct 3, the street on the east side of the street should connect to create another intersection on Dundas Street West, at the north end. In Precinct 4 the road network is much better, with connections to the existing neighbourhood to the south. Other streets within this block should avoid "dead ends".

Comment: The massing of buildings should be higher in the northeast corner of the Loblaw's site. Heights should be lower along the south edge to ensure a better fit with the existing community.

Meeting Summary produced by Brook McIlroy Planning & Urban Design.

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