

# Avenues & Mid-Rise Buildings Study

An architectural rendering of a modern urban street scene. The view is from a pedestrian's perspective on a wide sidewalk. On the left, a multi-story building features a mix of glass, brick, and red panels. In the center, a tram with a red and white livery is moving along the street. A cyclist in a blue shirt is riding in the same direction as the tram. On the right, another modern building with a glass facade and colorful panels is visible. The street is lined with trees, and several pedestrians are walking on the sidewalk. The sky is a clear, light blue.

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with  
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# Executive Summary

## Introduction

The City of Toronto is forecast to have approximately 3.08 million residents by 2031 – representing a growth in population of approximately 500,000 over the next 20 years. Strategies for how and where to accommodate this growth are of increasing importance. The City's Official Plan encourages a significant portion of this growth to be directed towards intensification areas, one of which is the Avenues. An important component of this study has been to understand the role that mid-rise buildings on the Avenues can play in accommodating Toronto's growth. Understanding the potential of mid-rise redevelopment also provides an important perspective as the City assesses the appropriate extent to which low-rise and tall building development may also accommodate this growth.

The Avenues amount to approximately 324 kilometres of property frontage. About 200 kilometres of this frontage can theoretically be redeveloped through mid-rise built form. If half of these properties were developed over the next twenty years through mid-rise built form, the Avenues could accommodate a new population of approximately 250,000 residents. Mid-rise redevelopment of the Avenues therefore has the ability to address a significant portion of the City's anticipated growth needs over the next twenty years.

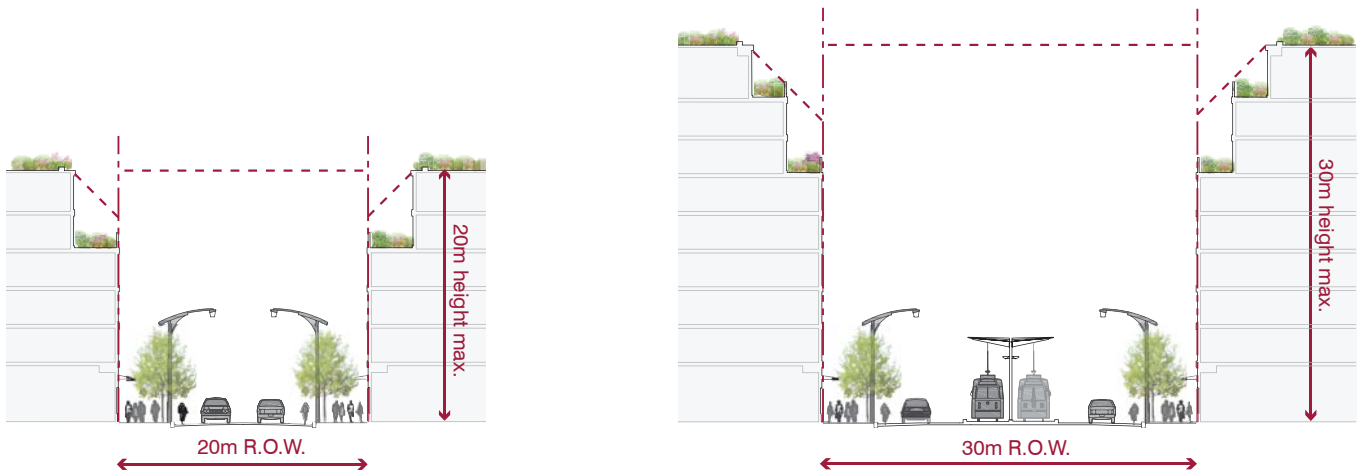
The Avenues policies in the Official Plan are intended to help the City direct growth to key main streets, and areas with existing infrastructure, including transit, retail, and community services, while protecting the character and stability of existing adjacent neighbourhoods. The character of growth that will occur through mid-rise built form will recognize the unique connection to these neighbourhoods through a development form that is moderate in scale and reflects high quality design and materials.

## Mid-Rise Building on the Avenues

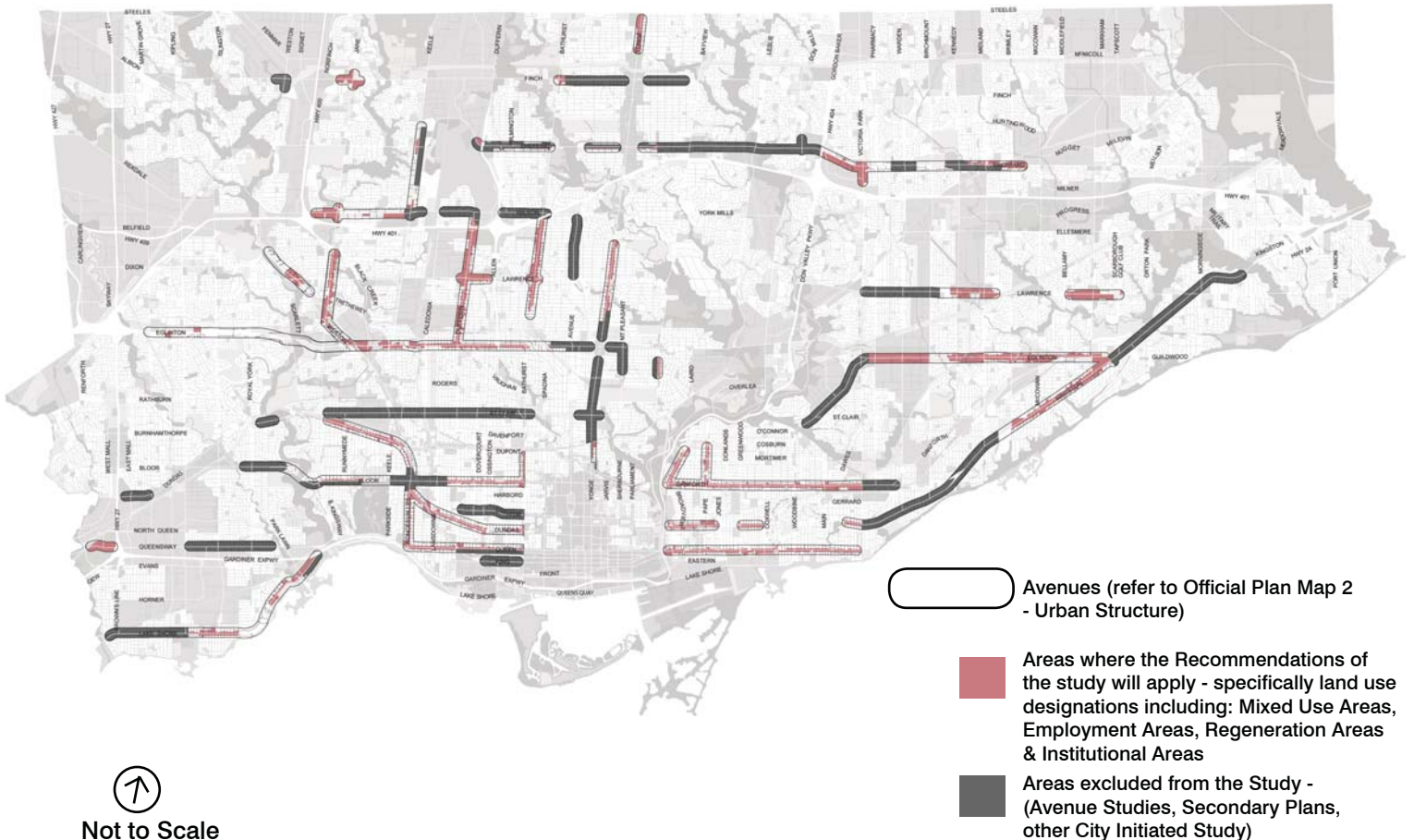
Mid-rise buildings are no taller than the width of the street right-of-way or between 5 and 11 storeys. The as-of-right height of a mid-rise building will be determined by a series of factors. The maximum height is established based on a 1:1 ratio where the maximum height of a building is equivalent to the width of the right-of-way. The ability to realize the maximum height is tempered by angular planes applied to the front of the site and the rear of the site respectively. Not all sites on the Avenues will be able to achieve the maximum height, as some properties are physically constrained. See Section 2.2 for further detail.

## Where the Recommendations of the Study Apply

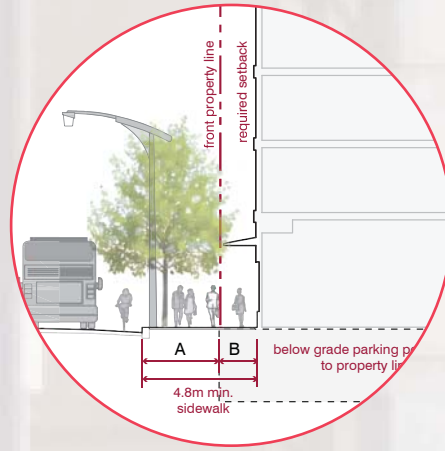
The segments of the Avenues that are designated in the Official Plan as Mixed-Use Areas, Employment Areas, Institutional Areas and Regeneration Areas are the locations where Avenues are to be reurbanized and targeted for growth. The recommended mid-rise Performance Standards of this study apply to these areas with the following exceptions: portions of Avenues where an Avenue Study is completed or underway, portions of an Avenue within a Secondary Plan Area, and portions of an Avenue that have been subject to other City-led studies that have resulted in an Official Plan Amendment and/or new Zoning By-laws. While other land use designations on the Avenues, including Neighbourhoods, Apartment Neighbourhoods, Parks and Open Space Areas, and Natural Areas are not intended for intensification, they should follow the public realm and streetscape improvement Performance Standards of this study. See Section 2.1 for further detail.



Maximum allowable height is determined by the width of the public right-of-way (all references to the R.O.W. or R.O.W. widths, denote the public R.O.W.). According to Official Plan Map 3 - Right-of-Way Widths Associated with Existing Major Streets, there are four widths - 20, 27, 30 and 36 metres that prevail on the Avenues.



Map of areas with the land use designations where the Performance Standards should apply (Mixed Use Areas, Employment Areas, Regeneration Areas and Institutional Areas).



## Objectives of the Study

The objective of the Avenues & Mid-Rise Buildings Study is to recommend policies and processes that can be adopted by the City to catalyze the reurbanization of the Avenues through the development of well-designed mid-rise buildings.

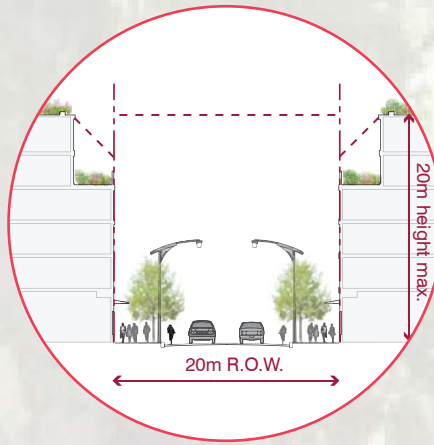
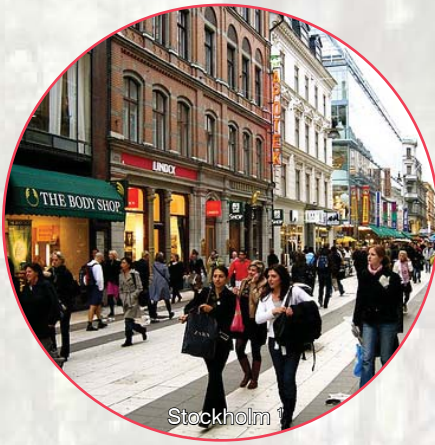
The objective of this study is to develop recommendations for urban design, policy and process that will encourage the development of more and better designed mid-rise buildings on the Avenues, where growth is expected and encouraged.

Over the last decade, the City has been compiling information on the barriers to mid-rise development through: the Mid-Rise Symposium; Avenue Studies; consultation with the development community; consultation with the public; and through feedback from City staff. These processes have resulted in a number of ideas for encouraging well-designed mid-rise development along the Avenues. This study will focus on the following recommendations:

- **Update zoning that reflects the Official Plan, and urban design guidelines.** As-of-right zoning for mid-rise buildings on the Avenues is generally seen as a positive advancement towards removing barriers to mid-rise development. The development community has acknowledged that new zoning will provide an incentive to develop mid-rise buildings on the Avenues. Recommendations that will assist in preparing the zoning are included in Section 3: Performance Standards.

- **Providing an expedited approvals process:** A dedicated Mid-Rise Interdivisional Team that is familiar with the past constraints to mid-rise development should be formalized to expedite the approvals process for mid-rise buildings on the Avenues (see Section 4: Recommendations).
- **Developing Compliance Alternatives for constrained sites:** A series of acceptable Compliance Alternatives for servicing, loading, parking, amenity space, etc. should be adopted by the City, allowing more constrained sites to be developed (see Section 4: Recommendations)

Overall, one of the most important factors that will catalyze the Avenues vision is “certainty” in the development process, which can be achieved through an adoption of mid-rise zoning. Achieving this certainty will be beneficial to the general public and surrounding communities as well, providing them with a cohesive and consistent vision for the Avenues.



## Building on the Official Plan

This Study is built on, and will help implement, policies and directions from the City's Official Plan, by:

- a) identifying the characteristics of appropriate growth, referred to here as 'mid-rise urbanism', that will revitalize the Avenues while protecting adjacent neighbourhoods;
- b) referencing previous City initiatives that influence mid-rise recommendations, including: Main Streets Initiative, Mid-Rise Symposium, completed Avenue Studies, Heritage Conservation Districts, Transit City, Tall Buildings - Inviting Change in Downtown Toronto, Toronto Green Standard, Green Roof By-law, and the Vibrant Streets Manual;
- c) engaging the public through open house events and focus groups, including discussions with development industry representatives, community stakeholders, and City Staff, including the Mid-Rise Interdivisional Team, Planning Reference Group, and Mid-Rise Core Team;
- d) recommending a series of mid-rise building Performance Standards to be implemented through various tools (i.e. Zoning By-law, urban design guidelines);
- e) examining a series of mid-rise building precedents that have been built in Toronto and international cities;
- f) identifying the optimal site and dimensional characteristics for efficient mid-rise development that informs a series of prototypes that are tailored to each of the prevailing right-of-way widths;
- g) assessing the development potential of sites with site specific constraints in a variety of contexts;
- h) recommending amendments to the policy and regulatory framework (i.e. Official Plan, Zoning By-laws, and urban design guidelines) to create a better climate for the development of mid-rise buildings on the Avenues, while providing the broader community with a level of comfort about the character of development;
- i) recommending modifications to City processes and procedures related to development application review, agreements and approvals processes;
- j) categorizing those segments of the Avenues where the City encourages growth, and identifying special circumstances that will inform how the Avenues are reurbanized, including Character Areas and retail at-grade requirements; and,
- k) identifying potential compliance alternatives related to technical requirements.

## Key Recommendations

Below is a summary of the key recommendations from this study. The recommendations are a result of information gathering and analysis, consultation with the public, development community and City Staff, and a review of existing conditions on the Avenues.

### Performance Standards for Mid-Rise Buildings

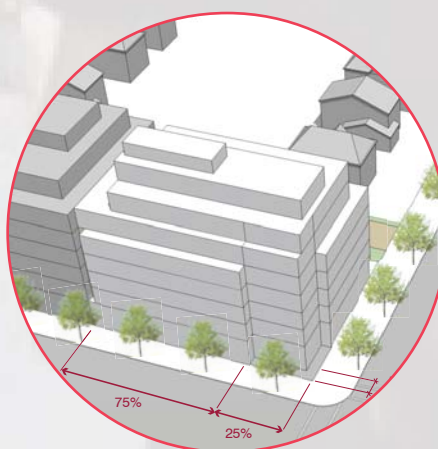
*To realize the vision for the Avenues, updated zoning is required. As-of-right zoning will remove bottlenecks which presently discourage mid-rise redevelopment of the Avenues, and will provide certainty to both the public and development community.*

- The City should implement the recommendations contained in Section 3: Performance Standards for Mid-Rise Buildings through new zoning and urban design guidelines for the Avenues. (See Section 4.2.1)
- The Character Area Study should provide additional preliminary guidance, through the Character Area descriptions in Appendix A and the Character Area Performance Standards 19A - G, for architectural and urban design for areas identified as Character Areas. Applications for buildings within Character Areas should include a Character Area Response Statement. (See Section 4.2.2)

### Official Plan

*The City's Official Plan review will commence in 2011. This study has examined at the Avenues on a city-wide basis and through site visits, analysis, test sites, etc., and have developed several recommendations regarding the Avenues that should be taken into consideration during the Official Plan review.*

- The City should broaden the Avenues to incorporate more of the arterial road network, including all Transit City corridors. (See Section 4.3.1)
- Presently segments of the Avenues with a land use designation of Apartment Neighbourhoods are not included in the Avenues mid-rise intensification policies. The City should consider including Apartment Neighbourhoods as part of the growth management framework for Avenues. (See Section 4.3.1)
- The City should consider redesignating some segments along Avenues that currently have a Neighbourhoods land use designation, particularly those that have, or are planned to have, high-order transit. (See Section 4.3.1)





## City Administration & Processes

*Implementation of updated Avenues zoning and urban design guidelines requires a concerted effort from City Staff, in all Divisions and ABCDs, to adopt a holistic city-wide system for public education, development application review and approval for mid-rise buildings. Such a system should reduce the approvals time for applicants, which has been identified as a major barrier to mid-rise development.*

- The City should permanently appoint a Mid-Rise Interdivisional Team that will review mid-rise building applications on the Avenues. This team should be familiar with the recommendations of this study with the purpose of expediting the approvals process for mid-rise buildings. (See Section 4.4.1)
- The City's Design Review Panel should review select applications for mid-rise buildings on the Avenues, with the objective of elevating the quality of design. (See Section 4.4.2)
- The City should utilize Official Plan Amendment 66 to secure high-quality building materials and streetscapes. Submissions for the Site Plan Approvals process should include 1:50 scale detailed building elevations to facilitate discussions with the City focused on design quality. (See Section 4.4.3)

## Other Recommendations

- The City should utilize the Compliance Alternatives developed as part of this study (currently under review) when reviewing applications on constrained sites or on sites that have difficulty in meeting certain technical requirements, but that otherwise meet the intent of the Performance Standards included in this study. (See Section 4.5.1)
- The City should consider alternative parking requirements for mid-rise buildings on Avenues that have a high-level of transit service or that apply acceptable Compliance Alternatives for providing vehicular and bicycle parking. (See Section 4.5.2 & 4.5.3)
- The City should consider amending indoor and outdoor amenity space requirements for mid-rise buildings on the Avenues, particularly in areas that have a high-level of community amenities and open space. (See Section 4.5.4 & 4.5.5)
- The City should initiate discussion with the Province to amend certain Ontario Building Code regulations that are major barriers to the development of mid-rise buildings. (See Section 4.5.6)
- The City should study certain Avenue segments with larger redevelopment sites, that may be appropriate for a different set of built form standards. This includes: sites that are so large they require new streets and blocks, sites that are adjacent to rail corridors (or other utilities), large sites in close proximity to subway / rail nodes, and the portion of Eglinton Avenue West between Martin Grove Road and Jane Street that has a 45 metre R.O.W. (See Section 4.5.7)

