

Updated City-wide Tall Building Design Guidelines

Date:	March 27, 2013
To:	Planning and Growth Management Committee
From:	Chief Planner & Executive Director, City Planning Division
Wards:	All
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SUMMARY

This report recommends that City Council adopt the updated city-wide "Tall Building Design Guidelines" (Attachment No. 1). These Guidelines update the "Design Criteria for the Review of Tall building Proposals" (2006) and consolidate the "Downtown Tall Buildings Vision and Performance Standards Design Guidelines" (2012).

Updates to the city-wide "Tall Building Design Guidelines" generally include:

- clear language, layout and graphic illustrations;
- strengthened connections to Official Plan policy;
- emphasis on design excellence, heritage conservation and sustainable design; and
- focus on contextual fit, quality of living and working conditions in and around tall buildings, cumulative effects of tall building clusters, sunlight/shadow and sky view impacts for streets, parks, open space and neighbouring properties, tower separation, daylight and privacy, generous sidewalk widths, and high-quality landscaped open space on-site.

The updated Guidelines represent the result of over six years of testing, monitoring and feedback from City staff, City Council and external stakeholders (e.g. local residents, architects, urban designers, planners and developers); experiences at the Ontario Municipal Board; and advice from the Design Review Panel. To further refine and finalize the Guidelines, City Planning staff also carried out a series of formal stakeholder consultations between August 2012 and February 2013.

The attached "Tall Buildings Design Guidelines" integrate and build upon previous Council-adopted tall building guidelines and establish a unified set of performance measures for the evaluation of all tall building development applications city-wide.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The City Planning Division recommends that:

1. City Council adopt the updated city-wide "Tall Building Design Guidelines" attached to this report (Attachment No. 1) for use in the evaluation of all new and current tall building development applications across the entire city together with the "Downtown Tall Buildings: Vision and Supplementary Design Guidelines" for those applications located within the applicable Downtown area boundary; and
2. City Council direct City Planning staff to make administrative updates to the attached Guidelines to reflect changes that may be made from time to time to related City policies, plans, guidelines and planning implementation tools.

Financial Impact

The recommendations in this report have no financial impact.

DECISION HISTORY

The update and consolidation initiatives resulting in the attached "Tall Building Design Guidelines" follow previous City Council-adopted direction as summarized below:

City-wide Tall Building Design Guidelines

In July 2006, City Council adopted the Urbana/HOK Canada consultant study, "Design Criteria for the Review of Tall Building Proposals" (<http://www.toronto.ca/legdocs/2006/minutes/council/cc060725.pdf>). Council also authorized implementation of these city-wide tall building design guidelines for a test period of one year. City Council subsequently extended this test period by an additional two years, to January 2010, to allow for further testing of the guidelines (<http://www.toronto.ca/legdocs/mmis/2008/pg/reports/2008-01-10-pg12-cr.pdf>).

In May 2010, City Planning staff provided City Council with an evaluation of the "Design Criteria for the Review of Tall Building Proposals" (<http://www.toronto.ca/legdocs/mmis/2010/pg/bgrd/backgroundfile-28938.pdf>). In adopting the report, City Council directed staff to continue applying the guidelines and to report back with updates to the guidelines based on the outcome of the testing period, including consultation with City staff and other stakeholders.

Downtown Tall Building Design Guidelines

Subsequent to the release of city-wide tall building design guidelines in 2006, City Planning undertook a comprehensive tall buildings visioning exercise for the Downtown. The resulting Urban Strategies/Hariri Pontarini consultant study was submitted to City Planning in April 2010. This study informed the "Downtown Tall Buildings Vision and Performance Standards Design Guidelines," adopted by City Council in July 2012 (<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2012.TE17.19>).

As part of the adopted report recommendations, City Council directed staff to consolidate the "Downtown Guidelines" with the city-wide "Tall Building Design Guidelines." The scope of the city-wide update was subsequently expanded to include this consolidation.

ISSUE BACKGROUND

During the past decade, the number of tall building developments in Toronto – particularly residential and mixed-use – has increased dramatically. Currently, Toronto leads all North American municipalities in the number of high-rise buildings under construction (source: Economic Dashboard – Annual Summary, General Manager, Economic Development and Culture, February 2013). The volume of tall building construction in Toronto points to a strong economic climate and in many cases is working to satisfy Provincial and Official Plan policy relating to intensification and accommodation of population growth across the city.

With a significant amount of tall building development taking place in Toronto, it has both challenged the City to keep pace and has provided an unprecedented laboratory to test the guidelines in various districts of the city. City staff has also been able to identify emerging opportunities and concerns related to tall building development to inform guideline updates and the review of future projects.

Many important factors influencing the design of tall buildings continue to be high priorities for local residents, City staff, the Design Review Panel, and City Council, including:

- compatibility and fit with the surrounding context;
- transition in scale down to lower-scale areas and heritage properties;
- provision of generous sidewalks and high-quality landscaped open space on-site;
- protection of sunlight and sky view access for surrounding streets, parks, open space and neighbouring properties;
- privacy and separation between tall buildings; and
- the overall quality of living and working conditions in and around tall buildings.

Emerging tall building debates include:

- the capacity of places and infrastructure to serve new and ever-taller buildings and their occupants;
- the liveability of the vertical communities being created;
- the cumulative effect of clusters of tall buildings, particularly on quality of life and the public realm;
- the longevity of what is being built, including the durability and lifespan of materials, construction techniques, and energy performance; and
- the ability of buildings to adapt and accommodate differing life-cycle or demographic needs and priorities over time.

In recognition of the high level of civic responsibility and obligation that tall buildings carry, the Official Plan includes specific “Built Form - Tall Buildings” policies (Section 3.1.3). These policies are based on the premise that tall buildings are desirable in the right

places, but do not belong everywhere. When appropriately located, designed, and “well-planned,” tall buildings can enhance the public realm, complement neighbouring buildings, and contribute to a sustainable future.

The attached updated "Tall Building Design Guidelines" further the goals and policies of the Official Plan and seek to address the abovementioned issues at four scales: Site Context; Site Organization; Tall Building Design; and the Pedestrian Realm.

COMMENTS

As a city-wide, urban design guideline, the attached "Tall Building Design Guidelines" focus on how the design of new tall buildings should be evaluated and carried out "to ensure that tall buildings fit within their existing and/or planned context and limit local impacts" (Official Plan 3.1.3 Built Form – Tall Buildings). The attached Guidelines do not address where tall buildings should be located or how tall they should be on a specific site. Instead, when it is determined that a tall building is supportable and represents “good planning,” these Guidelines will then apply to inform the site and building design.

Official Plan Policy

Under policy 1 in section 5.3.2 Implementation Plans and Strategies for City-Building, the Official Plan states that Guidelines will be adopted to advance the vision, objectives, and policies of the Plan. Urban Design guidelines specifically are intended "to provide a more detailed framework for built form and public improvements in growth areas." The "Tall Building Design Guidelines" serve this policy intent and assist primarily with the implementation of Chapter 3.1 The Built Environment, with a particular focus on 3.1.1 The Public Realm, 3.1.2 Built Form, and 3.1.3 Built Form – Tall Buildings, although there are many policies throughout the Plan relevant to tall building development review.

Each section in the updated "Tall Building Design Guidelines" includes references to specific Official Plan policies to strengthen connections between the guideline directions and broader policy goals of the Plan. Adoption of the attached "Tall Building Design Guidelines" will advance Chapter 3.1 The Built Environment, and other policies within the Plan related to the development and design of tall buildings in Toronto.

Consolidation with the Downtown Tall Buildings Vision and Performance Standards Design Guidelines (2012)

In July 2012, City Council adopted the "Downtown Tall Buildings Vision and Performance Standards Design Guidelines." As part of the adopted report recommendations, City Council directed staff to consolidate the Downtown Guidelines with the city-wide "Tall Building Design Guidelines".

The outcome of the Council-directed consolidation is as follows:

- all Downtown tall building performance standards with city-wide applicability have been integrated into the updated city-wide "Tall Building Design Guidelines;"

- location-specific aspects of the Downtown Guidelines, namely the Downtown Vision and the Tall Building Typologies with all associated mapping and tables, as well as all area- or site-specific performance standards unique to the study area, remain as-adopted by Council in a consolidated, companion guideline renamed the "Downtown Tall Buildings: Vision and Supplementary Design Guidelines;" and
- the city-wide "Tall Buildings Design Guidelines" will be used together with the consolidated "Downtown Tall Buildings: Vision and Supplementary Design Guidelines" to evaluate all new and current tall building development applications falling within the Downtown study area boundary. Secondary Plan Areas within the Downtown study area boundary will continue to be excluded from the Downtown Supplementary Design Guidelines.

The consolidated and renamed "Downtown Tall Buildings: Vision and Supplementary Design Guidelines," will become a chapter within the Council-approved District- or Area- Based Urban Design Guidelines (www.toronto.ca/planning/urbdesign/tableofcontents.htm). To assist with the review of tall building proposals within the Downtown study area boundary, the attached city-wide Guidelines include cross-references to the Downtown Supplementary Design Guidelines in each applicable section and in a summary table within Appendix B.

As a result of this Council-directed consolidation, the updated "Tall Building Design Guidelines" establish a unified set of performance measures for the evaluation of all tall building development applications city-wide, including all areas within the Downtown.

Guideline Implementation and Stakeholder Consultation

Between July 2006 and December 2012, the City tested and applied the tall building design guidelines in the evaluation of approximately 290 site-specific "tall building" development proposals (Source: City of Toronto IBMS/LUISII, January 2013). Nearly two-thirds of these proposals were reviewed in the Toronto & East York District, with the others spread almost equally across the remaining three Community Council areas. It is important to note that many of these tall building applications included multiple towers on large sites; therefore, the actual number of tall buildings reviewed city-wide is greater.

The city-wide Guidelines have also informed new planning and urban design area studies, such as the Humber Bay Shores Urban Design Guidelines, the York University Secondary Plan, the Lawrence Allan Revitalization Plan, and the Downsview Secondary Plan, and assisted in numerous decisions at the Ontario Municipal Board (OMB).

The updated city-wide "Tall Building Design Guidelines" represent the conclusion of over six years of testing, monitoring and feedback from City staff, City Council and external stakeholders (local residents, architects, urban designers, planners, developers, etc.); experiences at the OMB; and advice from the Design Review Panel (DRP). To further refine the specific sections of the updated Guidelines, City staff also carried out a series of formal stakeholder consultations between August 2012 and February 2013.

Key stakeholder engagement on the updated Guidelines took place with local community ratepayer associations and members of the general public in January 2013; the Building Industry and Land Development Association (BILD) in August and November 2012, and again in January 2013; and the Toronto Preservation Board in January 2013. As well, two consultations with the Design Review Panel were held in December 2012 and February 2013 respectively.

Each consultation session generated valuable input, which was incorporated into the attached "Tall Building Design Guidelines." While the interests of different stakeholder groups vary and often required balancing within the overall policy framework of the Official Plan, consultations also revealed that much of what is already established within the previous city-wide and Downtown guidelines is important and should, therefore, be carried forward into the updated Guidelines.

Updates emerging from Guideline testing and consultations centre around the following themes:

- clear language, layout and graphic illustrations;
- strengthened connections to Official Plan policy;
- emphasis on design excellence, heritage conservation and sustainable design; and
- focus on contextual fit, quality of living and working conditions in and around tall buildings, cumulative effects of tall building clusters, sunlight/shadow and sky view impacts for streets, parks, open space and neighbouring properties, tower separation, daylight and privacy, generous sidewalk widths, and high-quality landscaped open space on-site.

The specific details and directions related to the above themes are best understood by reviewing the attached Guideline document as a whole (refer to Attachment No. 1), however a brief overview of updates is also provided below.

Guideline Updates

In addition to clearer language, layout and graphic illustrations, notable additions and refinements to the updated "Tall Building Design Guidelines," emerging from the implementation and consultations discussed above, include the following:

Context

Section 1.1 Context Analysis was added to address feedback that too often tall building proposals are submitted with little response to the built form and open space patterns found within the surrounding area. Specific guidelines for the preparation of context plans will support a more comprehensive review of proposals. The need to consider and respond to the existing context has also been strengthened throughout the Guidelines to reinforce that simply meeting minimum guideline standards is not always enough to fit appropriately within a surrounding area.

Wider Sidewalks

The City has received comments that many tall buildings are being built with sidewalks that are too narrow to adequately accommodate various uses, including the pedestrian clearway, bicycle parking, street furniture, trees, boulevard cafés, etc. Section 4.2 Sidewalk Zone was added to the Guidelines, with minimum sidewalk dimensions measured from curb to building face, to address these concerns. The Guidelines also encourage creative solutions to achieve wider sidewalks at-grade on constrained sites.

Open Space

A message that was repeated by local residents, City staff and the Design Review Panel, is that many of the newer tall buildings are not providing sufficient high-quality landscaped open space on-site to meet the needs of new building occupants. In response, section 2.1 Building Placement of the updated Guidelines encourages a minimum landscaped open space target, which is flexible to include hard and soft landscape treatments at-grade and within rooftop amenity spaces on smaller infill sites. The Guidelines also add section 2.5 Private Open Space, to advance Official Plan policy around providing individual and common outdoor residential amenity spaces, including pet runs and private balconies.

Base Building Height Limit

The guidelines were modified to reinforce that the height of the base building is determined first by fitting with the existing context and second by the width of the adjacent street. Street widths up to 30 metres typically generate well-proportioned base buildings that frame the street at a comfortable pedestrian scale.

On wider streets (over 30m), if the maximum base building height is determined by the street width, the resulting base building can become too tall and bulky from a pedestrian perspective. As a result, the Guidelines include a height limit for base buildings on wider streets, related to the maximum height on a 30 metre street (6 to 7 storeys), to create a more comfortable street-level experience for pedestrians.

Exceptions to this base building height limit for Downtown High Streets/Canyon Streets remain within the Downtown Supplementary Design Guidelines; therefore, the city-wide Guidelines do not impact the height of base buildings on wider streets with taller streetwalls established in the Downtown.

Tower Separation

The minimum tower separation distances are consistent with the previous city-wide and Downtown guidelines. This subject is noteworthy as space and privacy between buildings continues to be one of the most challenging and critical issues in tall building design. Of all measures contained within the Guidelines, tower setbacks, stepbacks and separation distances are perhaps the most crucial to the quality of living and working conditions within and around tall buildings and to the impact towers pose for sunlight/shadow, sky view and pedestrian-level wind on surrounding streets, parks, open space and neighbouring properties.

To reinforce the importance of tower separation, the updated guidelines for Small Sites focus on first establishing the required tower setbacks, stepbacks and separation distances, and then evaluating the resultant floor plate shape and size to determine whether a proposed tall building site is viable and appropriate. The Guidelines also introduce emphasis on matching the separation distances established within the surrounding context when they are greater than the minimums recommended.

Cycling

Public outreach reinforced the need to address bicycle parking in and around tall building sites. Section 2.6 Pedestrian and Cycling Connections was added and for specific cycling-related requirements, the reader is directed to the Toronto Green Standard and the Guidelines for the Design and Management of Bicycle Parking Facilities.

Pedestrian Connections with Transit

A previous report to Council (July 2006) on the city-wide guidelines included a motion to develop additional design criteria related to enhanced pedestrian connections with local transit services. Guidelines have been added to section 2.6 Pedestrian and Cycling Connections, and to other sections of the updated Guidelines, to address the quality of pedestrian routes to priority destinations such as public transit stops and stations.

Public Art

A previous report to Council (July 2006) on the city-wide guidelines included a motion to add references to the Percent for Public Art Program. Section 2.7 Public Art was added to the updated Guidelines to support the identification of public art opportunities on tall building sites.

Sustainability

Sustainability was a separate section within the previous guidelines. The updated Guidelines weave sustainable design objectives and measures throughout all sections. Issues such as bird-friendly design, building energy performance, durability, and adaptability are examples of sustainable references now included throughout the attached Guidelines. The Toronto Green Standard is also referenced within applicable sections of the Guidelines.

Cumulative Effects

A final theme now integrated throughout the updated Guidelines relates to the cumulative effect of clusters of tall buildings within a given area of the city (such as around a transit node or major intersection). The Design Review Panel in particular emphasized the need to address the importance of evaluating proposed tall buildings together with other existing or potential tall building sites to achieve a better cumulative outcome for the public realm, sunlight/shadow, sky view, pedestrian-level wind, open space, etc.

Guideline Education and Training

City Planning staff will implement an internal and external education and training program for City staff and other stakeholders. The intent of this outreach is to ensure that

everyone who uses the Guidelines is familiar with the updated and consolidated Guidelines.

Training will also address a request from the development industry, as per consultations with the Building Industry and Land Development Association (BILD), that the City must work to ensure these Guidelines are applied in a consistent and appropriate manner in the evaluation of all tall building development applications across the city. To this end, the city-wide Guidelines contain a section on how to interpret the guidelines, which will be part of the education and training program.

Monitoring for Future Updates and Revisions

On-going monitoring of the Guidelines is an important part of the implementation process and will inform future updates and revisions to the Guidelines, as well as to other relevant City policies, studies, standards, guidelines and planning tools. Qualitative feedback is typically derived from City staff, public and community meetings, Design Review Panel meetings, City Council meetings, as well as informal and formal outreach to the development industry and planning, urban design and architectural communities.

Quantitative measures, such as tower setbacks, stepbacks and separation distances, base building heights, tower floor plate sizes, landscaped open space percentages, and sidewalk widths, will be monitored as tall building applications are evaluated and approved over time. Experience has already shown that there can be challenges in meeting certain quantitative measures on a consistent basis, however, it is also apparent that the most challenging measures are often the most critical to ensure that tall buildings fit within their existing and/or planned context and limit local impacts.

By continually monitoring tall building projects and collecting comprehensive data on key performance measures, the City will be better able to address future tall building design requirements, including updates to the Guidelines, the formation of new Area- or Site-Specific plans, policies and guidelines, as well as possible amendments to the Official Plan and Zoning By-law.

Conclusion

The volume of tall building construction in Toronto points to a strong economic climate, which has both challenged the City to keep pace and has provided an unprecedented laboratory to test the guidelines in various markets and districts of the city and with changes in tall building form and technologies.

The attached "Tall Building Design Guidelines" provide a unified set of design guidelines for the evaluation of all new and current tall building applications across the entire city. The updated Guidelines will also continue to inform planning and urban design area studies, as well as other relevant City policies, plans, guidelines and planning implementation tools.

Adoption of the attached "Tall Building Design Guidelines" will bring a greater degree of clarity and certainty to the evaluation process for City Council, City staff, residents and community stakeholders, as well as the design, planning and development industry.

The attached Guidelines update and consolidate previous Council-adopted city-wide and Downtown tall building design guidelines, and reflect substantial input from City staff, the Design Review Panel and consultations with local ratepayer associations, the design, planning and development industry (including BILD), the Toronto Preservation Board, and members of the general public.

The Official Plan states that Guidelines will be adopted to advance the vision, objectives, and policies of the Plan (Section 5.3.1, policy 1). Urban Design guidelines specifically are intended "to provide a more detailed framework for built form and public improvements in growth areas." The attached "Tall Building Design Guidelines" serve this policy intent and will advance Chapter 3.1 The Built Environment, and other policies within the Plan related to the design and development of tall buildings in Toronto.

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ATTACHMENTS

Attachment 1: Tall Building Design Guidelines

Attachment 1: Tall Building Design Guidelines

Attached separately as a PDF. Available on the on-line Agenda for Planning & Growth Management Committee's April 11, 2013 meeting.