



STAFF REPORT ACTION REQUIRED

A Sign of Citizen Engagement: Improving Development Proposal Public Notice Signs

Date:	April 22, 2015
To:	Planning and Growth Management Committee
From:	Chief Planner and Executive Director, City Planning
Wards:	All
Reference Number:	P:\2015\ClusterB\PLN\PGMC\PG15066

SUMMARY

At its meeting of July 8, 2014 City Council requested that the Chief Planner and Executive Director, City Planning, undertake a review of the Development Proposal Public notice signs, with the goal of developing new signage that is informative and easy to understand, while encouraging citizen involvement in the planning process, and to consult with residents' associations, development industry representatives and other relevant stakeholders while conducting that review.

This report outlines the outcomes of that review, including a brand new look for the public notices.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Chief Planner and Executive Director, City Planning Division, recommends that:

- 1) Planning and Growth Management Committee receive this report for information.

Financial Impact

The recommendations in this report will have no financial impact.

DECISION HISTORY

At its meeting on July 8, 2014, City Council adopted a motion requesting the Chief Planner and Executive Director, City Planning to undertake a review of the Development Proposal Public Notices toward signs that are attractive and use language that is informative and easy to understand while encouraging citizen involvement in the planning process; consult with residents' associations, development industry representatives and other relevant stakeholders while conducting the review; and to report on the outcome of the review to the Planning and Growth Management Committee. The motion can be seen here:

<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2014.MM54.14>

This report responds to the above direction of the Committee.

ISSUE BACKGROUND

Development Proposal Public Notices are large signs posted on development sites upon the submission of a complete application for a Official Plan amendment, zoning bylaw amendment, draft plan of subdivision or a draft plan of Condominium (common elements and vacant land only) to City Planning for consideration. The signs are required under the Planning Act, and are intended to provide notice of the statutory public meeting and/or open house associated with the application. City of Toronto notices include basic information related to the application, including the legal address of the subject property or properties, proposed use, height and density, as well as the number of parking spaces for both automobiles and bicycles. Additional notification mechanisms prescribed under the Planning Act include mailouts to residents within 120 metres of the development site and newspaper ads.

City Planning last updated the Development Proposal Public Notices in 2009, when the original white signs with simple block lettering were replaced with a more graphic version featuring an improved layout, including a black title bar at the top of the sign with the words "Development Application", and the associated address or addresses, as well as an image of the proposal (usually depicted as an elevation or site plan). In addition, the sign was designed with text that met the accessibility requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act, given the absence at the time of similar legislation for Ontario or Canada.

In 2014, City Planning began a pilot project that added QR codes to the signage, directing residents to the Application Information Centre (AIC), where they could learn more about the proposal. QR codes are a convenience, which allow the public to scan the code with their smartphone, which then directs them to a website.

COMMENTS

Background Review

As an initial step towards improving the signage, staff undertook an extensive review of existing laws and regulations governing notice for development proposals and the new Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA). Importantly, while legislation requires the signage on development sites, there are no legislated design specifications, beyond what is required by the AODA.

The review of the legal framework was supplemented by a literature review, including a review of work by local designers and urban advocates showcased in the "Fourth Wall" produced by Toronto's own Urbanspace Gallery, as well as an examination of similar signage from across North America.

Staff also consulted with a number of student groups from both OCAD University and the University of Toronto, who were working on studio assignments to redesign the signage. As part of their work, the students produced several sign prototypes that included common elements such as simplified language, the use of icons to explain the details of the proposal, improved imagery, and a more eye-catching design. A public survey conducted by the students at OCAD University found that the vast majority of respondents approved of these proposed changes.

Internal and External Consultation

In addition to a background review, an internal staff workshop was held with 25 staff in attendance, including representation from City Planning's Community Planning, Graphics and Visualization and Strategic Initiatives, Policy and Analysis teams, the Chief Planner's Office, Strategic Communications and the City Clerk's Office Design and Production unit. At the workshop, staff were split up into four groups and were tasked with generating separate prototypes of their ideal signage. Generally, staff felt that the new signage should:

- be seen as an invitation to participate in the development review process;
- provide as much information about the proposed development as possible, while still remaining easy to read;
- reduce the amount of text required to convey the important information;
- be seen as an opportunity to improve planning literacy; and,
- be highly graphic, preferably with the use of icons to outline proposal details.

Common concerns of staff revolved around how to address the temporal nature of the signs, and the need to ensure that any imagery included on the sign is not misconstrued as an attempt to market the proposal.

As part of the ongoing *Growing Conversations* consultations, staff consulted with Residents' Associations who were invited to special roundtables to discuss improvements to the engagement

process, including the issue of Development Proposal Public Notice Sign. Generally, residents felt that the new signage should include:

- information about the height and density of the proposal, as well as the use;
- a timeline of the application process;
- a call to action (a call to participate in the process);
- the date the application was submitted;
- a QR code and/or link to additional resources;
- an image in context; and,
- simpler language.

Additionally, City Planning Directors and senior staff were consulted regularly throughout the design process, and their feedback is reflected in the redesign.

Staff also shared the redesign and background research with members of the Toronto Chapter of BILD at their monthly chapter meeting in April 2015 and received their feedback. In general, reaction was tentatively positive, though there was some concern with regards to the proposed use of an image illustrating new developments in context. In addition, attendees expressed a desire to see existing permissions also posted on the sign, so that the public could better understand the scale of the change that is being proposed in relation to existing as-of-right permissions. This is a change that is currently being considered by Planning staff.

Final Design

The new design can be seen in Attachment 2. Major elements of the redesign include:

- A corporate banner and colour that is consistent with City of Toronto branding, and that features a return of the word "Notice", which is intended to grab the attention of passersby. By incorporating "type as art" the word Notice becomes a bold, modern design element that creates a visual identity making the signs easily recognizable wherever they are located;
- The words "A change has been proposed for this site" are written in bold letters immediately below the corporate banner. This is intended to immediately inform the viewer of what the notice is about in simple, easy to understand language;
- A brief text description intended to communicate the exact nature of the proposal (i.e. a zoning by-law amendment, Official Plan amendment, etc);
- A proposal summary that utilizes 3 generic icons to further explain the details of the proposed change. These icons correspond to information regarding the size (height, number of storeys and density) and use of the proposed new building, as well as the proposed provisions for bicycle and automobile parking. The information is included below the icons in text format;
- Additional information regarding the proposal that could be used in a search on the Application Information Centre;
- Where applicable, space for an image of the proposed development in context that is either an elevation or a 3D massing model;

- A disclaimer below the image that indicates the date the submission or resubmission was made and directing the reader to the AIC for a more up-to-date rendering, as the proposal may be subject to change;
- A call to action featuring three options for obtaining more information or providing feedback: contact your community planner; go online; and attend an in-person meeting. The sign has been designed so that details related to the time and location of the public meeting can be added to the sign when it becomes available, through the application of a sticker;
- Simpler language throughout, and an interface that should be more accessible to people with minimal English language skills;
- Total compliance with AODA requirements; and

Of additional importance to note is the fact that the sign has been designed to be an extension of the online Application Information Centre (AIC), where residents can obtain more detailed information regarding development proposals. A QR code that links directly to the AIC is provided in addition to a vanity URL, with pertinent information that can be used to search for the development in question, including the file number, ward number and site address. It is intended that this integration with the AIC will further improve as updates are made to the AIC to make it more accessible and user friendly. Specifically, it is intended that the QR code and vanity URL will ultimately point directly to the application itself, though this is not yet currently possible.

Implementation

City Planning has already begun to pilot the use of the new signs, with the first sign having gone up at a development site at 250 Lawrence Avenue West on the week of April 13th, 2015. City Planning will continue to pilot the signs on a voluntary basis with interested developers for a period of several months, as an opportunity to test their efficacy and to gather feedback from both the public as well as developers. Minor changes to the signage can be expected as a result of this pilot phase. It is expected that the signs will be fully deployed on all new development sites as of January 1st 2016.

CONTACT

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SIGNATURE

Jennifer Keesmaat, MES, MCIP, RPP
 Chief Planner and Executive Director
 City Planning Division

ATTACHMENTS

Attachment 1: Old signage

Attachment 2: New signage

ATTACHMENT 1: Old Signage




Development Proposal

440, 444, 450, 462 Front Street West
425, 439, 441, 443 Wellington Street West
1 & 19 Draper Street
6-18 Spadina Avenue

Applications to amend the Official Plan and zoning by-law to permit a mixed- use development comprised of 7 mixed use buildings with a combined Gross Floor Area of approximately 290,000 m², 52% of which is proposed to be nonresidential (office and retail) uses and 48% residential use. There are 1587 residential units proposed, with a total of 2316 parking spaces to support the development. Loading and parking will be accommodated below-grade. A 34 storey office building with retail uses located within the first 3- levels is the tallest of the 7 buildings proposed and is planned for the corner of Front St. W. and Spadina Avenue. Building heights transition down towards Draper St. and Wellington Street.


STATUTORY PUBLIC MEETING:

Information will be posted once meeting is scheduled.

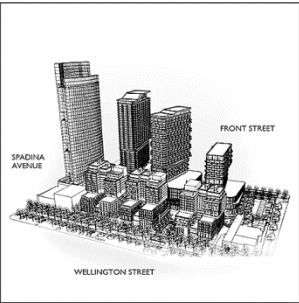
 **TORONTO** FILE # 14 116571 STE 20' OZ

For information:
www.toronto.ca/planning_developmentapplications
City Planner: Dan Nicholson, Senior Planner
416-397-4077 dnichol2@toronto.ca

ATTACHMENT 2: New Signage



Notice



The above image represents the proposal as submitted on February 12, 2014 and may change. Go to web link or contact the Community Planner for any updates or more information.

A change has been proposed for this site.




A Development Application has been submitted to amend the Official Plan and Zoning By-law to permit a mixed-use development including 7 buildings with residential, office and retail uses.

Proposal summary:

SIZE 11.7 x Density 34 Storeys (tallest) 176.7 metres	USE 1587 Residential Units GFA: 299,000 m ² 52% Office/Retail 48% Residential	PARKING 2316 Cars 4000 Bikes
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District & Ward: Toronto & East York - Ward 20
Site Address: 440, 444, 450 462 Front Street West
425, 439, 441, 443 Wellington Street West, 1 & 19 Draper Street and 6-18 Spadina Avenue
Applicant: RAD (Front Wellington)
Nominee Inc-DV
Application File #: 14 1116571 STE 20 OZ

For information & to tell us what you think:

 <p>COMMUNITY PLANNER: Dan Nicholson 416-397-4077 dnichol2@toronto.ca</p>	 <p>ONLINE: www.toronto.ca/aic File #: 14 1116571 STE 20 OZ</p>	 <p>IN PERSON: A meeting has not yet been scheduled. Details will be posted here and online as they become available.</p>
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APPLICATION INFORMATION CENTRE

PUBLIC MEETING