



STAFF REPORT ACTION REQUIRED

Townhouse and Low-Rise Apartment Guidelines Project

Date:	October 20, 2015
To:	Planning and Growth Management Committee
From:	Chief Planner and Executive Director, City Planning
Wards:	All
Reference Number:	P:\2015\ClusterB\PLN\PGMC\PG15124

SUMMARY

The purpose of this report is to introduce the Townhouse and Low-rise Apartment Design Guidelines Project to Council and to outline City Planning, Urban Design's objectives, strategy and work completed-to-date for this important City-building initiative.

The primary objectives of the Project include:

- Develop new Urban Design Guidelines for Townhouses and Low-rise Apartments to update and replace the current Council-adopted Urban Design Guidelines for Infill Townhouses (2003)
- Develop these Low-rise Guidelines together with internal and external stakeholders in an open, collaborative and highly consultative manner
- Coordinate these Guidelines with the development of new low-rise built form urban design policies within the City of Toronto's Five-Year Official Plan Review
- Identify related City policies, standards and guidelines, such as the Development Infrastructure Policy and Standards (DIPS), which influence townhouse and low-rise apartment development and recommend measures to align design expectations and outcomes.

City Planning, Urban Design will continue to develop and refine the Draft Townhouse and Low-rise Apartment Guidelines with the intent to report to Planning and Growth Management Committee in the second quarter of 2016 with finalized Guidelines for adoption.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The City Planning Division recommends that:

1. The Planning and Growth Management Committee direct the Chief Planner and Executive Director, City Planning to use Attachment 1, Draft Townhouse and Low-Rise Apartment Guidelines, as the basis for further consultation and report back to the meeting on May 11, 2016.

Financial Impact

There is no financial impact related to this report.

DECISION HISTORY

In February 2003, City Council adopted "Design Guidelines for Infill Townhouses" (<http://www.toronto.ca/legdocs/2003/agendas/council/cc030204/plt2rpt/cl004.pdf>). Council authorized City staff to use these Guidelines to inform the review of all new townhouse development applications city-wide.

At the January 5, 2012 Planning and Growth Management Committee meeting City Planning staff was requested to review "Pedestrian Considerations within Infill Developments" (<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2012.PG10.14>), including the City's current "Urban Design Guidelines," in order to give increased consideration to the pedestrian realm, and report back to the Committee with any suggested revisions.

On May 14, 2015, Planning and Growth Management Committee adopted the report "Official Plan Five-Year Review: Urban Design Consultation Summary and Next Steps" (<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2015.PG4.4>). The report provided an overview of Phase I of the Urban Design Policy Consultations "Urban Design Matters" undertaken as part of the City of Toronto's Five-Year Official Plan Review. Feedback received by City Planning through the consultation process included the need to re-examine and clarify development criteria for low-rise buildings, as well as the need to establish urban design policies for low-rise developments.

ISSUE BACKGROUND

Townhouses have been a common and successful form of residential development in Toronto since the mid-1800's. The City's traditional narrow lots accommodated buildings with windows on the front and rear for cross ventilation; front yards, rear yards and often rear lanes with parking. In the post-war period, townhouses continued to be a popular form of residential development taking shape within new lot and block configurations as grade-related housing near higher density apartments, schools and shopping centres.

In response to a growing volume of townhouse development applications, City Council adopted "Design Guidelines for Infill Townhouses" in 2003, and the "Development Infrastructure Policy and Standards" (DIPS) in 2005. Both the Infill Townhouse

Guidelines and DIPS responded to, among other things, the decline in the quality of streetscapes and adequate area for landscaping and street trees created by the market for narrow frontage units with front yard parking and integral garages. DIPS placed limits on the use of private residential streets and established clear directions for the layout and design of new public residential streets.

Since 2003, the demand for low-rise, grade-related housing has remained strong. It continues to be a desirable and often affordable housing choice for many, including families. Land and construction prices have risen and the simple townhouse form has been supplemented by a wide variety of taller, denser and more complex building types, including; stacked townhouses, back-to-back townhouses, stacked and back-to-back townhouses, low-rise apartments and hybrid buildings (see Attachment 2: Summary of Townhouse and Low-Rise Apartment Building Types).

Although townhouses and low-rise apartments are generally not taller than four storeys, the denser and more complex development applications seen today significantly challenge the City's ability to secure a high quality public realm and living environment.

The Council-approved "Infill Townhouse Design Guidelines" (2003) do not presently address the full range of urban design issues and concerns encountered within current development applications. Updating and replacing the Infill Townhouse Design Guidelines (2003) is a logical step to provide greater clarity and a more complete urban design framework to evaluate all types of townhouse and low-rise apartment development city-wide.

At the same time, as part of the City of Toronto's Five-Year Official Plan Review, "Urban Design Matters," there is direction to develop new low-rise built form urban design policies. It is anticipated that the further refinement and consultation on the Townhouse and Low-rise Apartment Guidelines will inform the development of these new policies and vice versa.

The purpose of the Townhouse and Low-Rise Apartment Guidelines Project presented in this report is to build upon the Council-adopted "Infill Townhouse Design Guidelines" (2003), collaborate with internal and external stakeholders, and establish clear, city-wide urban design direction to help guide this complex and important type of development.

COMMENTS

What are Townhouses and Low-rise Apartments?

Townhouse and Low-rise Apartment buildings take many forms, but can generally be understood as predominantly residential buildings, up to four storeys tall.

The City-wide Comprehensive Zoning By-law 569-2013, as amended, defines and regulates residential building types within zone categories. Residential building types set

out in the By-law that relate to the scope of these Guidelines mainly include Townhouse and Apartment Buildings and to a lesser degree Triplexes and Fouxplexes (see Attachment 2: Summary of Townhouse and Low-Rise Apartment Building Types).

"Back-to-Back" and "Stacked Townhouses" are not defined residential building types in Zoning By-law 569-2013. However, these popular design and marketing terms are commonly used when reviewing development applications to better describe the types of units and building configurations seen within the low-rise "Apartment Building" typology.

The types of residential buildings described above are typically constructed in rows or blocks. The Official Plan generally permits these forms of development within designated *Mixed Use Areas, Regeneration Areas and Apartment Neighbourhoods*. Although they often fit under the four-storey height limit for residential development in designated *Neighbourhoods*, policies regarding built form and neighbourhood fit may impose greater restrictions upon the presence of this development type within such *Neighbourhoods*.

It is the intent of the Guidelines Project to reinforce the regulatory framework of the Official Plan and Zoning By-law, while addressing the wide variety of townhouse and low-rise apartment building types and specific urban design-based concerns where such developments are proposed. The Guidelines will not direct where townhouses and low-rise apartments are permitted forms of development.

Townhouse and Low-Rise Apartment Development Applications

In order to understand the current state of design for low-rise, multi-unit buildings, a District-based scoped inventory of approved townhouse and low-rise apartment projects was compiled by the City staff and completed in April 2015.

The inventory comprised 132 approved development applications that were filed between January 1, 2006 and December 31, 2014. The inventory included data of key quantitative criteria for each development, such as land use designation, type of townhouse development, number and type of dwelling units, minimum facing distances between buildings, and provision of amenity space.

The data indicated that during this eight year period, the greatest number of approved projects was found in the North York and Toronto-East York Districts, accounting for a total of 80 approved applications (see Table 1). The data also showed that the majority of projects were townhouse developments, with a varied number and type of dwelling units, but primarily characterized by two and three-bedroom units. The denser and more complex townhouse types exist in smaller numbers across the City.

Table 1: Low-rise Development Application Inventory Organized by Type, 2006-2014

District	Townhouse	Stacked	Back-to-Back	Stacked Back-to-Back	Other*	Total
North York	22	4	1	0	15	42
Toronto - East York	22	8	1	2	5	38
Scarborough	20	5	0	2	7	34
Etobicoke –York	12	1	0	1	4	18
Total	76	18	2	5	31	132

* the "Other" category captures a variety of developments such as townhouses in association with a tall building, or mid-rise building, or combinations of multiple low-rise types.

Beyond the timeframe of the inventory, which included approved applications to the end of 2014, City staff have experienced an increase in back-to-back and stacked townhouse development applications reinforcing the need to update the existing Infill Townhouse Guidelines (2003) to address these more complex building forms.

Identifying Key Issues

A Core Team was established consisting of 12 staff from the Urban Design and Community Planning Sections of City Planning. The role of the Core Team is to observe and critique existing developments, provide a scoped inventory of existing townhouses and low-rise apartment buildings, study best practices, undertake an internal and external consultation process, and develop the Guidelines.

On October 15 and 24, 2014, the Core Team toured over 15 townhouse type developments (including a number of stacked and back-to-back projects) across all Districts. The tours of townhouse developments included all types, primarily on large sites and were led by City Planning staff with expertise in the subject development. These tours offered the Core Team an opportunity for direct observation of current built form conditions, with particular attention to the site elements, layout, building massing and design.

In addition to these site visits, the Core Team reviewed the inventory of approved development applications, as summarized in Table 1 above, to identify trends, successes, key issues and areas of concern. A detailed review of the current Infill Townhouse Guidelines (2003) was also conducted to identify areas which appear to be working well and those which need strengthening or review.

The current draft Townhouse and Low-Rise Apartment Guidelines (refer to Attachment 1 or visit toronto.ca/lowriseguidelines), is the culmination of work-to-date resulting from this thorough background analysis, as well as ongoing internal and external consultation

and collaboration outlined later in this report. It is anticipated that the key issues and resulting guidelines will continue to evolve as the Guidelines are refined and finalized.

Purpose and Scope of the Guideline Project

The purpose of the Townhouse and Low-Rise Apartment Guidelines is to update and replace the Infill Townhouse Guidelines (2003) and to illustrate how the public realm and built form policy objectives of the Official Plan can be addressed by:

- Identifying strategies to enhance the quality of the living environment through improved spatial relationships, design and materials;
- Establishing a balance between the protection of stable residential neighbourhoods and heritage features while allowing for appropriate infill development and intensification; and,
- Providing best practices for use by proponents, particularly land developers, architects, and landscape architects, and to provide guidance to municipal planners in effectively evaluating the acceptability of an application.

Once updated and adopted by Council, the Townhouse and Low-Rise Apartment Guidelines will apply to the design, review, and approval of all new townhouse and low-rise apartment development, which are 4 storeys or less, city-wide. The Guidelines will be used when evaluating development proposals, including Official Plan Amendments, Zoning By-law Amendments, Plans of Subdivision and Site Plan Control applications.

Traditionally, urban design guidelines are developed in the City of Toronto to help implement and clarify Official Plan policies for a particular building type or in a particular location within the city. The timing of these Guidelines is somewhat unique in that there is not only the opportunity to respond to the existing Policies of the Plan, but due to the City of Toronto's Five-Year Official Plan Review, there is also an opportunity to coordinate the work on this project with the new and revised policies as they may relate to low-rise development. Coordination of these two parallel policy and guideline initiatives is a top priority.

A Collaborative and Consultative Approach

A main objective of the Guidelines is to provide certainty, yet flexibility, in creating building designs and development layouts that reflect the goals and policies of the Official Plan, including making a positive contribution to quality of life and fitting appropriately within the context of the surrounding community. The complexity and importance of this objective demands a high degree of internal and external consultation to build a set of guidelines that best represent the diversity of interests and expectations.

In addition to ongoing collaboration with internal stakeholders, the current draft Guidelines (Attachment 1) reflect the results of a project mandate for an open and consultative process. Table 2 summarizes the consultation, public outreach and

stakeholder engagement carried out to-date. A more detailed outline of each action is provided in Attachment 3: Consultation Overview.

Table 2: Summary of Consultation and Outreach To-date

Consultation and Outreach Action	Details/Timing
1. Public Outreach Online toronto.ca/lowriseguidelines	Current Draft Guidelines posted online for review Project highlights and staff contact information
2. Online Survey: direct outreach to townhouse (including stacked and back-to-back) residents	September 11-October 5, 2015 Approx 50 respondents
3. Building Industry and Land Development Association (BILD)	Staff Presentation I: June 24, 2015 BILD comments received by letter July 31, 2015 Staff Presentation II: September 29, 2015
4. Federation of North Toronto Residents Associations (FoNTRA)	Draft Guidelines circulated for review FoNTRA comments received by letter August 5, 2015
5. Design Review Panel (DRP)	Staff Presentation I: July 7, 2015 DRP comments received by meeting minutes Staff Presentation II: October 1, 2015 DRP comments to be received by meeting minutes
6. Toronto Society of Architects (TSA)	Draft Townhouse and Low-Rise Apartment Guidelines Forum and Panel discussion: April 14, 2015 Discussion comments compiled from staff notes

As the draft Guidelines are further developed and refined over the coming months, it is City Planning, Urban Design's intent to continue with an open and consultative approach. By introducing the Guideline Project to Council through this report, it is anticipated that additional stakeholders will become aware of the initiative and seek opportunities to participate and engage.

Next Steps

The following work must be completed prior to finalizing the Guidelines for consideration and adoption by City Council in the second quarter of 2016:

- Continued public consultation with industry stakeholders, residents' associations and others as identified
- Review and consideration of results from Online Survey
- Consultation and collaboration with relevant City Divisions, such as Toronto Building, Engineering and Construction Services, Transportation Services, Toronto Fire, Solid Waste Services, Parks, Forestry and Recreation, Public Health and other relevant City Divisions

- Consultation and collaboration with City Planning staff and Design Review Panel, particularly on key issues and document utility
- Coordination with City of Toronto's Five-Year Official Plan Review, "Urban Design Matters" low-rise policy development
- Identification of opportunities from Guidelines for future amendments to Zoning By-law 569-2013
- Evaluation of potential impacts to Development Infrastructure Policy and Standards (DIPS), as well as any other City policies, standards and guidelines.

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ATTACHMENTS

Attachment 1: Draft Townhouse and Low-Rise Apartment Guidelines
Attachment 2: Summary of Townhouse and Low-Rise Apartment Building Types
Attachment 3: Consultation Overview

Attachment 1: DRAFT Townhouse and Low-Rise Apartment Guidelines, October 2015

Attachment 2: Summary of Townhouse and Low-Rise Apartment Building Types

Townhouse and Low-rise Apartment buildings take many forms, but can generally be understood as predominantly residential buildings, up to four storeys tall. The different building types identified and addressed in the Guidelines include:

Townhouses generally consist of 2 to 3 1/2-storey structures that share a sidewall with a neighbouring unit and have a minimum of 3 housing bays. They typically have a front and a back.

Stacked Townhouses share a sidewall and have units stacked vertically (typically two or three units above one another). Like the townhouse type they have a front and a back.

Back-to-Back Townhouses share a rear wall as well as a sidewall and have two fronts. Each unit has its own entrance to grade.

Stacked and Back-to-Back Townhouses share a rear wall as well as a sidewall and have units stacked vertically. This can include three units located on top of each other, two-level units stacked on top of one-level units, or two-level units stacked on top of two-level units. Other layout solutions may be possible. Typically each unit has its own entrance to grade.

Low-rise Apartment Buildings are 4 storeys or less in height and share interior corridors, vertical circulation and entrances, and have multiple units stacked vertically. Typically units are located on both sides of a corridor (double-loaded) and, sometimes, only on one side of a corridor (single-loaded).

Hybrid Buildings combine lower units with direct access to grade as well as upper units that gain access from a shared corridor, vertical circulation and entrance.

Chapter 5 in Attachment 1: Draft Townhouse and Low-Rise Apartment Guidelines provides a visual overview of these different building types.

City-wide Comprehensive Zoning By-law 569-2013 Definitions

The City-wide Comprehensive Zoning By-law 569-2013, as amended, defines and regulates residential building types within zone categories. The following building types defined in the By-law are related to the types of buildings addressed in the Guidelines:

Townhouse has three or more dwelling units, and no dwelling unit is entirely or partially above another.

Apartment Building has five or more dwelling units, with at least one dwelling unit entirely or partially above another and each dwelling unit has a separate entrance directly from outside or through a common inside area.

Triplex has three dwelling units, with at least one dwelling unit entirely or partially above another.

Fourplex has four dwelling units, with at least one dwelling unit entirely or partially above another.

"Back-to-Back" and "Stacked Townhouses" are not defined residential building types in Zoning By-law 569-2013. However, these popular design and marketing terms are commonly used when reviewing development applications to better describe the types of units and building configurations seen within the low-rise "Apartment Building" typology.

Attachment 3: Consultation Overview

The following provides a more detailed overview of Table 2: Summary of Consultation and Outreach To-date contained within the Comments section of this report.

1. Public Outreach Online

The website www.toronto.ca/lowriseguidelines was created to enable interested parties to obtain information and learn about the study. It provides information about the context of the Guidelines, the status of the Guidelines, as well as links to related standards, Guidelines, studies and an online survey.

2. Online Survey

Approximately 50 people participated in the online survey that was available on the Townhouse and Low-Rise Apartment Guidelines webpage from September 11 to October 5, 2015. The survey comprised a mix of multiple-choice and open-ended questions intended to find out what the public's experience has been living in townhouses, particularly stacked and back-to-back townhouses, and how it can be improved. As a way of bringing the survey to the attention of the residents, over 600 postcards were mailed to residents within the inventoried stacked townhouse projects with information on how they can access the survey online.

Results of the survey indicate that 58% of respondents reported not having an adequate amount of shared amenity space, while 60% of respondents preferred to have more private outdoor amenity space. Additionally, 56% of respondents expressed that they did not have an adequate amount of storage space. Despite these results, the survey suggested that the denser and more complex townhouse forms remain popular as 66% of respondents indicated they would consider moving into a stacked or back-to-back townhouse if they were to move.

3. Building Industry and Land Development Association (BILD)

City Planning staff presented the Draft Guidelines to the Building Industry and Land Development Association (BILD) on June 24, 2015. BILD provided feedback at the meeting and in a letter dated July 31, 2015.

BILD queried, recommended changes and sought clarification to wording throughout the document and advised that the Guidelines should:

- Avoid being too prescriptive, more objective based and allow for flexibility
- Be consistent with other guidelines (e.g. Tall Building Guidelines)
- Be applied consistently across City Districts
- Not exceed their purpose and leave some requirements to be regulated through the Building Code, Plan of Subdivision or the Zoning By-law
- Not be a barrier to affordability by restricting building types and configurations (e.g. basement units) and by requiring fewer parking spaces

BILD further recommended:

- Addressing sound transmission between units, by raising STC rating up to 70 in Building Code
- Improving amount of storage space for units
- Designing townhouses to include second suites
- Reconsidering the use of "one size fits all" large garbage trucks as the requirements for site circulation and truck accommodation puts unrealistic demands on smaller sites
- Supporting a revision to DIPS to locate sidewalks next to curbs
- That mid-rise development should be encouraged in some areas rather than low-rise development

BILD's letter also expressed a desire to continue to consult further as the Guidelines progress. As a result, a follow-up consultation with BILD took place on September 29, 2015, where the changes to the Draft Guidelines were presented. BILD will review the revised Draft Guidelines and respond to City staff with their comments.

4. Federation of North Toronto Residents Associations (FoNTRA)

The Federation of North Toronto Residents' Associations (FoNTRA) is a non-profit, volunteer organization dedicated to ensuring better development in Toronto. The Draft Guidelines were sent to representatives of FoNTRA and their comments were provided in a letter on August 5, 2015.

FoNTRA believes the development of the Guidelines is an important undertaking due to the volume of badly designed townhouse developments, and that they have the potential to become an education tool for all stakeholders including resident groups, Councillors, Committee of Adjustment and OMB members. In addition, they recommended that references to Official Plan policy should be cited throughout the Guidelines as to make them more defensible at Community of Adjustment and Ontario Municipal Board hearings. They also believe that performance measures pertaining to minimum hours of sunlight on the public realm is an important element of the Guidelines, and should be fleshed out in more detail.

FoNTRA queried, recommended changes and sought clarification to wording throughout the document and further advised that the Guidelines should:

- In Section 5 - Bringing it All Together, address realistic field applications
- Produce a series of guideline documents or links for the different types of townhouses and low-rise apartment types
- Provide a direct connection to policies and zoning to address why some variances are acceptable while others are not
- Lead to related guidelines for tall single and semi-detached housing with front integral garages
- Provide heritage section as a separate guideline

5. Design Review Panel (DRP)

The Draft Townhouse and Low-Rise Apartment Guidelines were presented to the DRP at their July 7, 2015 meeting.

The DRP was unanimously in favour of further development of the Guidelines and called them a highly valuable and a much needed addition to the City's suite of urban design guidelines. The Panel provided several comments, including:

- Making the document more concise
- More graphics and diagrams; clearly outlining requirements vs. Guidelines; and ensuring consistency of message throughout the document
- Turning some performance standards in to By-laws
- Revising DIPS to be consistent with Toronto Green Standards and the Draft Guidelines
- Supporting greater separation distances between buildings and recognizing Toronto's cultural overlay when it comes to providing light, view and privacy
- Clarifying the real differences between types
- Stacked and back to back townhouses should take another form when entrances do not face a street (e.g. low-rise apartment or townhouse)
- Stacked and back to back townhouses are a creation of the Building Code in that it encourages grade manipulation to achieve maximum number of storeys, consistency of interpretation is required between Planners and Examiners
- Creating quality that is affordable can be a challenge

Staff presented revised Draft Guidelines to the Panel on October 1, 2015. The Panel expressed their continued support of the Guidelines that the document can still be made more concise and recognizes that the document is still a work in progress. They indicated that the graphics should be clear in their intent, particularly as it relates to where we want to encourage this form of development. They also expressed that the guidelines should set a strong strategic vision.

Meeting minutes can be found on the Design Review Panel website

<http://www1.toronto.ca/wps/portal/contentonly?vgnextoid=4da652cc66061410VgnVCM10000071d60f89RCRD>).

6. Toronto Society of Architects (TSA)

The Toronto Society of Architects (TSA) organized a forum on the Draft Townhouse and Low-Rise Apartment Guidelines on April 14, 2015. The panel of design professionals discussed the design of townhouses and low-rise apartment buildings.

Feedback that was received from the TSA forum recognized the stacked and back-to-back townhouse type as the most challenging to design. The forum supported looking at adequate separation distances between buildings, consistency of application across Districts and the Guidelines not being too prescriptive. It was also pointed out that although the Draft Guidelines had the potential to reduce the yield somewhat on some properties, the market would adjust to the new condition.

A member of the audience recommended that there be more spaces for kids to play and shared outdoor amenity space, as well as limiting sound transmission between units, especially in stacked and back-to-back buildings.