

**Long Branch Neighbourhood Character Guidelines –
Final Report**

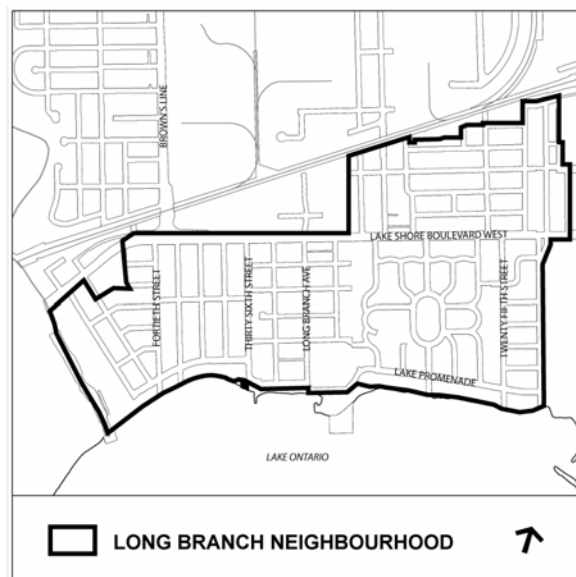
Date:	October 26, 2017
To:	Etobicoke York Community Council
From:	Director, Community Planning, Etobicoke York District
Wards:	Ward 6 – Etobicoke-Lakeshore
Reference Number:	16 142715 WET 06 TM

SUMMARY

This report presents and seeks City Council adoption of the recommended Long Branch Neighbourhood Character Guidelines. This neighbourhood is experiencing significant development and there is a concern by many that the character of the neighbourhood is being eroded. As a result, it would be important for this neighbourhood to be able to define its character and identify what elements are important to maintain and preserve that character.

The recommended Long Branch Neighbourhood Character Guidelines result from a City-initiated study, which commenced in early 2016, for all residential lands bounded by Lake Ontario to the south, the rail corridor to the north, Twenty Third Street to the east, and Forty Second Street (including Marie Curtis Park) to the west. This neighbourhood is currently undergoing physical change, resulting from ongoing infill and redevelopment, at a rate which is higher than that of many other neighbourhoods within the City of Toronto.

The Long Branch Character Guidelines is the first of a pilot project of a larger City-wide Neighbourhood Character Guidelines Template being developed by City Planning. Another pilot area currently



being studied is the Willowdale neighbourhood.

The City retained SvN Architects + Planners to assist with the preparation of the "Neighbourhood Character Guidelines Template" and "How to Manual" which would establish a City-wide framework by which neighbourhood-specific guideline documents can be prepared. City staff and the consultants studied two pilot area neighbourhoods (Long Branch and Willowdale) to create and test Guidelines that could be used as an example for other neighbourhoods in the City.

The Long Branch Neighbourhood Character Guidelines aim to ensure that future development within this community is undertaken in a manner which is sensitive and generally consistent with the existing physical character of this neighbourhood. The framework of the Guidelines is based on six themes: (1) height and massing; (2) building elements; (3) driveways and garages; (4) setbacks and landscape; (5) special features; and (6) heritage.

The Long Branch Neighbourhood Character Guidelines will serve as a toolkit for use by home builders, the community, City staff, committees and appeal bodies to reference as they develop plans, enhance the public realm and/or review applications for redevelopment. The "How to Manual" has been incorporated in the Guidelines (under Chapter 3, Section 3.1) in order to provide a framework for how to use these Guidelines (see Attachment 1: Long Branch Neighbourhood Character Guidelines).

This report recommends that Council adopt the Long Branch Neighbourhood Character Guidelines. Should Council adopt these Guidelines, it is also encouraged that the Guidelines be subject to review and evaluation from time to time as the Official Plan is reviewed, to ensure they remain applicable as the Long Branch neighbourhood continues to evolve, and as the Official Plan and Zoning By-law are amended.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The City Planning Division recommends that:

1. City Council adopt the Long Branch Neighbourhood Character Guidelines, included as Attachment 1 to this report.
2. City Council direct staff to apply the Long Branch Neighbourhood Character Guidelines in the review of all new development applications and public initiatives for all residential lands bounded by Lake Ontario to the south, the rail corridor to the north, Twenty Third Street to the east, and Forty Second Street (including Marie Curtis Park) to the west.
3. City Council authorize the Acting Chief Planner and Executive Director, City Planning to make such stylistic and technical changes to the Long Branch Neighbourhood Character Guidelines as may be required.

Financial Impact

The recommendations in this report have no financial impact.

DECISION HISTORY

This City-initiated study, commenced in early 2016, provided the opportunity for City staff, the Ward Councillor, the consultants and the residents of Long Branch to partake in fulsome discussions to identify issues and opportunities in Long Branch, complete a comprehensive analysis of the character of the area and establish principles and test ideas in order to prepare the Long Branch Neighbourhood Character Guidelines.

Study Background

The objective of the study was to identify the neighbourhood's key character defining qualities, and to ensure that future developments (new or additions/alterations) in Long Branch are undertaken in a manner which is contextually-sensitive and responsive to the prevailing neighbourhood character. To achieve this, the Guidelines incorporate a design methodology which evaluates future development at three concentric scales, including:

1. The property in relation to adjacent properties;
2. The property in relation to the street and block segment; and
3. The property in relation to the broader neighbourhood context.

A neighbourhood's character is composed of a number of individual elements that together contribute to the creation of a distinct 'sense of place'. The City of Toronto Official Plan, as amended, incorporates a set of policies which support the protection and enhancement of existing lands within a *Neighbourhoods* designation. The Official Plan criteria to evaluate development in *Neighbourhoods* is set out in Policy 4.1.5, which states:

Development in established *Neighbourhoods* will respect and reinforce the existing physical character of the neighbourhood, including in particular:

- Patterns of streets, blocks and lanes, parks and public building sites;
- Size and configuration of lots;
- Heights, massing and scale and dwelling type of nearby residential properties;
- Prevailing building type(s);
- Prevailing design and elevation of driveways and garages;
- Setbacks of buildings from the street or streets;
- Prevailing patterns of rear and side yard setbacks and landscaped open space;
- Continuation of special landscape or built-form features that contribute to the unique physical character of a geographic neighbourhood; and
- Conservation of heritage buildings, structures and landscapes.

The Official Plan also goes on to state that no changes will be made through rezoning, minor variance, consent or other public action that are out of keeping with the physical

character of the neighbourhood.

Overall, *Neighbourhoods* are considered to be physically stable areas and development is to respect and reinforce the existing physical character of buildings, streetscapes and open space patterns. The recommended Long Branch Neighbourhood Character Guidelines intend to provide home builders, the community, City staff, committees and appeal bodies a means to better understand the Long Branch community as it relates to these Official Plan policies.

It should also be noted that the character of a neighbourhood is influenced by, but not limited to, architectural style. It is important to understand that Guidelines are ultimately concerned with compatibility rather than similarity of elements or “mimicking”, and therefore focus on character over style.

The preparation of the Long Branch Neighbourhood Character Guidelines has followed a three step process: (1) the analysis of issues and opportunities; (2) the development of a vision and design priorities; and (3) the refinement and preparation of the Guidelines.

Public Engagement

On May 17, 2016, City Planning staff, together with the Ward Councillor and the consultants (SvN Architects + Planners), held a public meeting to outline the above process and present the purpose and scope of the Neighbourhood Character Guidelines and the various design elements that help shape Guidelines. The meeting was attended by approximately 100 members of the public. In order to help identify issues and opportunities, participants were asked to provide feedback on three concepts:

1. Design elements they felt are/are not compatible with the character they envision for Long Branch.
2. The strengths and weaknesses of Long Branch including favourite areas, areas that could be improved, areas that are most representative of neighbourhood character, and areas of concern.
3. A description of neighbourhood character.

On June 28, 2016, the consultants conducted a walking tour of the Long Branch neighbourhood with a community advisory group (approximately 60 members) consisting of residents and other stakeholders. Also in attendance was City Planning staff and the Ward Councillor. The purpose of the walking tour was to further explore issues and opportunities that were raised at the public meeting and to develop a vision and identify design priorities for Long Branch. Participants were requested to provide feedback on those design elements they felt were priorities and ideas for how these design priorities could be implemented through the Guidelines.

On February 7, 2017, City Planning staff, together with the Ward Councillor and the consultants, held a second community advisory group meeting attended by approximately 40 members. The participants were presented with reference materials that included a

draft Character Framework Plan and draft Neighbourhood Character Guidelines for Long Branch.

The Character Framework Plan (titled Character Summary in the Guidelines) highlighted the character defining conditions of the area which include, but are not limited to:

- Historic Long Branch housing stock dating back to original "villa" lots; corner lots of distinctive character.
- Hipped or gabled roofs, front porches, brick or wood siding, ground-related first floor, and prominent and grade-related entrance and window placements to establish a strong street interface.
- Consistent and generous front yard setbacks with exceptions where dictated through variations in the street and block network (i.e. Arcadian Circle), maintaining continuous street wall conditions, landscaping, mature trees, and accent planting while allowing for projections and recesses to articulate the primary façade, and minimizing curb cuts to maintain the continuity of the pedestrian realm.

Framework of the Guidelines

The draft Neighbourhood Character Guidelines identified six themes: (1) height and massing; (2) building elements; (3) driveways and garages; (4) setbacks and landscape; (5) special features and (6) heritage. The recommended Neighbourhood Character Guidelines were provided in the following framework for each theme:

- A. Overview of the primary conditions in Long Branch and the key design guidelines related to the particular theme;
- B. Reference of the key design objectives and supporting diagram for each theme;
- C. Summary of the zoning regulations pertinent to each theme;
- D. Explanation of the intent and implication of these regulations in the context of the Long Branch neighbourhood;
- E. List of key design guidelines to achieve the intent and purpose of the zoning and mitigate potential conflicts with the character of the neighbourhood;
- F. Sidebar of relevant 'Character Defining Conditions';
- G. Annotated photograph of existing conditions which are considered incompatible related to the particular theme; and
- H. Annotated photograph of an existing compatible condition related to the particular theme.

The participants were requested to provide feedback on potential refinements to strengthen the draft Guidelines and ensure they were consistent with the character defining conditions that were previously identified through the public meeting and walking tour.

On September 26, 2017, City Planning staff, together with the Ward Councillor and the consultants, held a final public meeting to seek further refinements before finalizing the Neighbourhood Character Guidelines for Long Branch. This meeting was attended by

approximately 80 members of the public. This provided staff with another opportunity to engage those residents that did not take part in the walking tour and the community advisory group meeting.

Long Branch Neighbourhood Character Guidelines

The Long Branch Neighbourhood Character Guidelines are expected to be used to advance the City's Official Plan Policies (under the *Neighbourhoods* designation) and the regulations of the zoning by-laws (the former City of Etobicoke Zoning Code and City-wide Zoning By-law No. 569-2013) to help translate these directions into desired outcomes for the design of buildings, streets and open spaces. The recommended Long Branch Neighbourhood Character Guidelines (see Attachment 1: Long Branch Neighbourhood Character Guidelines) are intended to serve as a toolkit for use by home builders, the community, City staff, committees and appeal bodies to reference as they develop plans, enhance the public realm and/or review applications for redevelopment for all residential lands within the study area.

The intent of the Guidelines is to complement the Official Plan policies and by-laws with a series of design recommendations aimed at reinforcing the established character of the neighbourhood and mitigating potential conflicts. In order to achieve a balance between the policies and zoning regulations, priority themes have been identified. The recommended themes and design guidelines include:

Height and Massing

The recommended Neighbourhood Character Guidelines rely on the perception of the general shape, form and size of the building. While building dimensions such as height or width can be purely quantitative, mass and scale are typically qualitative dimensions that result from combining many spatial parameters in context, include but not limited to:

- Proportion between building dimensions;
- Comparison to the dimensions of adjacent buildings;
- Alignment with other buildings; and
- Height and location relative to the public streets.

Building Elements

The recommended Neighbourhood Character Guidelines rely on the design details that together compose the street-related face of a building. The articulation of these design details include and collectively influence the perception of a building's mass and scale by the:

- Slope and orientation of roofs;
- Level and depth of the front entrance;
- Size and quantity of windows;
- Placement and prominence of ornamental façade elements; and
- Type and combination of materials.

Driveways and Garages

The recommended Neighbourhood Character Guidelines rely on the citing and access to the garage, as well as surface parking within each property. While parking may have little impact to the site layout on large lots, lot frontage is usually tight for residential lots within an urban condition and thus parking competes for space with other elements, including but not limited to: front entrance; doors and windows; pedestrian walkway; trees; and gardens.

Setbacks and Landscape

The recommended Neighbourhood Character Guidelines rely on the dimensions that determine the placement of a building on a property and in turn, the amount and use of open space around a building. Setbacks and landscape play a critical role by:

- Defining the interface between the private and public realm;
- Increasing or decreasing the perception of density; and
- Providing visual connections to soft landscaping within a neighbourhood.

Special Features

The recommended Neighbourhood Character Guidelines rely on those elements that play a critical role in contributing to the public realm of a neighbourhood. The existing mature tree canopy and open space system (neighbourhood parks, the Etobicoke Creek and Lake Ontario shoreline) are vital assets in Long Branch's public realm and contribute significantly to its overall character.

Heritage

The recommended Neighbourhood Character Guidelines stress the importance of historical significance attributes to a neighbourhood and the importance of identification and following the appropriate steps to protect a community's heritage.

NEXT STEPS

Moving forward, the consultant (SvN Architects + Planners) is currently preparing Neighbourhood Character Guidelines for the Willowdale pilot area as well as finalizing the City-wide "Neighbourhood Character Guidelines Template", both targeted to be completed in 2018.

The Template will provide the rationale, planning process context and high-level overview of the "how to" of preparing Neighbourhood Character Guidelines. In addition, introductory information on each of the guideline sections and accompanying worksheets (that communities can use to develop guidelines of their own) will also be included as part of this Template.

Overall, the studied pilot area neighbourhoods (Long Branch and Willowdale) will be used as a guide for other neighbourhoods in the City to use to complete their own "Neighbourhood Character Guidelines Template".

CONCLUSION

The recommended Long Branch Neighbourhood Character Guidelines aim to ensure that development respects and reinforces the existing physical character within the Long Branch neighbourhood. They will serve as a toolkit for use by home builders, the community, City staff, committees and appeal bodies to reference as they develop plans, enhance the public realm and/or review applications for redevelopment to achieve compatibility and a variety of architectural styles between existing and new/altered buildings.

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SIGNATURE

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ATTACHMENT

Attachment 1: Long Branch Neighbourhood Character Guidelines

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