

REPORT FOR ACTION

Townhouse and Low-Rise Apartment Guidelines - Final Report

Date: October 24, 2017

To: Planning and Growth Management Committee

From: Acting Chief Planner and Executive Director, City Planning

Wards: All

Reference Number: 15 216792 EPS 00 TM

SUMMARY

The purpose of this report is to provide information to the Planning and Growth Management Committee on the Townhouse and Low-rise Apartment Guidelines ("the Guidelines") and to recommend that City Council approve the Guidelines as contained in Attachment 1 of this report for use in the evaluation of all new townhouse and low-rise apartment development applications. When adopted, the Guidelines will replace the 2003 Council-approved Infill Townhouse Guidelines.

Following the November 16, 2015 Planning and Growth Management Committee meeting, City Planning was instructed to initiate further consultation on the draft Guidelines and report back to the Committee during the second quarter of 2016. A first round of consultation occurred in early 2016. The input received resulted in a number of significant changes and improvements to the Guidelines. A second round of consultation on the updated Guidelines took place through the summer and fall of 2016. The finalized Guidelines contained in Attachment 1 integrate and balance a wide variety of stakeholder perspectives and align with the current policy framework and best practices for townhouse and low-rise apartment projects.

The report also recommends establishing a monitoring program that will evaluate the effectiveness of the Guidelines over a period of 2 years, after which any further changes or refinements to the Guidelines or related policies and implementation tools will be presented for Council consideration.

Finally, the report includes recommendations to determine how implementation of the Guidelines may be better supported through updates to related City policies and standards, such as the Official Plan and Development Infrastructure and Policy Standards (DIPS).

RECOMMENDATIONS

The City Planning Division recommends that:

- 1. City Council approve the "Townhouse and Low Rise Apartment Guidelines" (Attachment 1) for use in the evaluation of current and new townhouse and low-rise apartment development applications, effectively replacing the 2003 Infill Townhouse Guidelines; and
- 2. City Council direct City staff to monitor the effectiveness of the Guidelines for a period of at least two (2) years and determine if any further revisions to the Guidelines or related policies and implementation tools are warranted for Council consideration.

FINANCIAL IMPACT

The recommendations in this report have no financial impact to the City.

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/viewAgendaltemHistory.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/viewAgendaltemHistory.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.

On November 16, 2015, Planning and Growth Management Committee adopted the report with amendments on the "Townhouse and Low-Rise Apartment Guidelines Project".

http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaltemHistory.do?item=2015.PG8.12

Item 2 of the Committee's decision directed the Chief Planner and Executive Director, City Planning to use the draft Townhouse and Low-Rise Apartment Guidelines as the basis for further consultation and report back to the Committee in May, 2016.

The Committee also requested the Chief Planner and Executive Director, City Planning to:

- consider revising the language in the Guidelines that would require, without incentives, the development industry to a) build family sized housing units; and b) define what size best represents the definition of family size units; and
- report back on the unintended consequences that the current Development Infrastructure Policy and Standards has on low-rise infill development sites in the City of Toronto.

COMMENTS

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 for access to parking. In the 20th century 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 apartments, schools and shopping centres, both in urban and suburban settings.

Throughout the 20th century in Toronto, walk-up apartments were also built. These lowrise buildings took the form of 2 to 4 storey structures with a central stairwell and common lobby entrance. Low-rise apartments typically served as a transitional building type between busier mixed-use main streets and lower scaled residential neighbourhoods.

Over time, new types of housing units emerged within the townhouse form that introduced new relationships between the individual unit, vertical circulation and grade. The City of Toronto introduced the "Infill Townhouse Guidelines" (2003) to help assess and guide the large and growing volume of townhouse development applications on small, infill sites. The infill guidelines responded to, among other matters, the decline in the quality of streetscapes and inadequate area for landscaping and street trees. This condition was created by narrow frontage units with front yard parking and integral garages and/or minimal front yard setbacks and narrow street widths.

In response, in part, to a growing volume of townhouse development applications on private streets, City Council adopted the "Development Infrastructure Policy and Standards" (DIPS) in 2005. 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 housing choice for many, including families. Land and construction prices have risen and the simple townhouse form has been supplemented by a variety of taller, denser and more complex building types.

Increasingly, townhouses and low-rise, multi-unit residential apartment buildings are now being constructed on large sites with underground parking garages. These larger sites are often found at the edges of "tower in the park" apartment areas and on lands being converted from non-residential uses. Low-rise residential intensification also continues to take place on smaller infill sites.

Along with the conventional townhouse, the more complex forms of multi-unit, low-rise housing, such as stacked townhouses, back-to-back townhouses, and stacked and back-to-back townhouses have emerged on large and smaller sites bringing greater challenges to matters of transition, fit, setbacks, landscape and overall quality of life.

Although townhouses and low-rise apartments are four storeys or less, the denser and more complex development applications seen today often challenge the City's ability to ensure these new developments fit into their surrounding context and secure a high-quality public realm. The Council-approved Infill Townhouse Design Guidelines (2003) helped to ground the Official Plan's policies and vision with more detailed guidance for implementation, however, these guidelines no longer address the full range of urban design considerations encountered within current development applications. Updating and replacing the Infill Townhouse Design Guidelines (2003) is a necessary step to provide greater clarity and a more complete urban design framework to evaluate all types of townhouse and low-rise apartment developments, city-wide.

Differences Between the 2003 Infill Townhouse Guidelines and the new Townhouse and Low-Rise Guidelines

At the outset of the study, in late 2014, staff created an inventory from 2005 to 2015 of all built and approved low-rise, multi-unit residential projects in the City. Staff also toured numerous built projects, undertook a best practice review, conducted a survey and undertook consultation.

Staff concluded from this research and consultation, that the Guidelines should address the following challenging design aspects of townhouse and low-rise apartment development, particularly on sites where multiple building blocks and the more intense types are employed:

 More attention needs to be paid to how a new development is integrated into and connected to its context;

- Facing distances between buildings are often inadequate for light penetration into units and onto amenity spaces;
- A proliferation of protruding balconies, underground access stairs, and utility boxes further compromise the spaces between buildings;
- Developments need to relate more directly to the existing grade on site and abutting properties;
- Below-grade and a raised terraces, below-grade entrances, and excessive staircases, affect the street frontage when building units/bays are narrow;
- Setbacks and built form controls need to be clarified in order to ensure new developments fit-in with existing context and transition to neighbouring properties;
- Parking ramps and site servicing areas (such as loading, garbage storage and collection) create negative impact on and off site, and reduces the opportunity for more positive outdoor amenity uses; and
- Raise the overall quality of developments in terms of site layout, architecture, landscape design, and materiality.

The Guidelines therefore are intended to assist in achieving an improved approach to site context, site organization, building types and configuration, massing, design, and the public realm. Each section begins with a principle guideline statement which is followed by a number of supplementary guidelines, supporting photographs, diagrams and a rationale, as well as references to relevant Official Plan policies and other related City standards, guidelines and studies.

Below is a comparison table of these aspects and how they differ between the 2003 Infill Townhouse Guidelines and the new Guidelines:

Table 1: Comparison between the 2003 Infill Townhouse Guidelines and the new Guidelines (except where specified in a Site and Area Specific Policy or Site Specific Zoning By-law)

Areas of Interest	Infill Townhouse Guidelines (2003)	Townhouse and Low-Rise Apartment Guidelines (2017)
Facing Distances (front-to-front or back-to-back)	15.0m	11.0m - 15.0m depending on the height of buildings and whether there are belowgrade private outdoor amenity spaces between buildings
Rear and Side Yard Setbacks	7.5 m rear yard building setback No setback guidelines pertaining to the front of a building facing the side of another building (front-to-side condition)	Revised to "Provide half the distance specified in Table 1, Facing Distance, between the face of a building containing primary living spaces, such as living and dining rooms, and the side of another building or property line."

Areas of Interest	Infill Townhouse Guidelines (2003)	Townhouse and Low-Rise Apartment Guidelines (2017)
Angular Planes	45 degree angular plane measured from the rear property line of the adjacent residence	Retains this guideline and expands to include "properties designated Neighbourhoods, Parks, Natural Areas, or Other Open Space Areas."
Access to Units	Addresses first floor level, but does not specifically address circumstances for stacked units with multiple unit entrances at grade. First floor level should be raised approximately 3 to 5 steps above the grade of the sidewalk, the top of the front door stoop should not be more than 0.9 m above grade	Recognizes that buildings can contain multiple entrances along the building façade, including below-grade entrances and provides guidance accordingly. Retains this guideline but increases maximum height above grade from 0.9m to 1.2m. Section 4.3 Primary Entrances, Below-grade Entrance provides further guidance for below-grade entrances in terms of avoiding them on streets, lanes/shared driveway, or landscaped walkways. Providing them instead within pedestrian mews or from an internal shared hallway of a hybrid building or apartment building. The Guideline also addresses the conditions under which they would be allowed on streets and provides design guidance on Shared Landings.

Areas of Interest	Infill Townhouse Guidelines (2003)	Townhouse and Low-Rise Apartment Guidelines (2017)
Front Yard Setback	Front Yard Setback should provide for: an entry, front stoop and landscaping between the public sidewalk and the private unit. Match existing adjacent properties. A min. 6.0m setback from the front property line when parking is at the front of the townhouse A min. 2-3.0m setback from the front property line for services and privacy when parking is at the back.	Retains these guidelines and provides the metric of 4.5m to the front of the unit in addition to 6.0m to the front of the garage and 3.0m from the front property line when parking is at the rear or underground (or consistent with the setbacks of adjacent buildings). This is, among other objectives, to provide adequate soil volume to support street trees as per Toronto Green Standard.
Private Outdoor Amenity Space	Not Addressed	Describes the form that private outdoor amenity areas take: terrace (balcony/deck), balcony, back yard or garden. Specifies that below grade and at-grade private outdoor amenity spaces cannot be located on public/private streets, but may be permitted on local residential streets provided that they are raised above grade as part of a porch. Provides dimensions, heights above grade and design guidance for these areas. Below or at-grade private outdoor amenity space may be provided in pedestrian mews or courtyards provided that they meet certain design criteria. Provides guidance and dimensions for balconies and terraces.

Areas of Interest	Infill Townhouse Guidelines (2003)	Townhouse and Low-Rise Apartment Guidelines (2017)
Shared Indoor and Outdoor Amenity Areas	Provide common open space such as children's playgrounds (i.e. privately maintained tot lots) when appropriate.	The Guidelines reiterate a City-wide zoning by-law requirement in Section 3.2 Shared Indoor and Outdoor Amenity Areas. a. "For multi-residential developments defined as "Apartment Building" under the City-wide by-law, with 20 units or more, provide a minimum of 4m² of shared amenity space for each unit, 2m² of which is provided as indoor shared amenity space." Other guidelines in this section address the location and design of these elements.
Public vs. Private Streets	New streets should be public streets; if streets cannot be built to accepted public standards they will be considered private streets. Private streets should also conform to high quality standards and be designed to look and perform like public streets.	Revised to: 3.1 Streets, Lanes, Mews and Walkways b. Provide new public streets and lanes that conform to the City's standards. The street sections and setbacks take into consideration DIPS classifications which were established after the Infill Townhouse Guidelines. However current DIPS standards should be revised to reflect the current requirements for street sections including ROW widths to accommodate wider sidewalks and required soil volumes to support shade trees as per the Toronto Green Standard. The Official Plan and DIPS should provide guidance on the limited conditions under which a private street would be acceptable.

Areas of Interest	Infill Townhouse Guidelines (2003)	Townhouse and Low-Rise Apartment Guidelines (2017)
Locating parking ramps, access stairs and garbage storage within the building	Integrate auto ramps and service entrances into the building façade to minimize space needs and potential unsightly appearance	In Section 3.4 Site Services, Access and Parking, it states that "back of house" activities should be located internally within the building to reduce negative impacts these operational areas have on the public realm. Parking garage ramps, access stairs, garbage collection/storage areas, and loading areas are to be incorporated into the building. This helps to ensure open spaces onsite are used as amenity spaces and not cluttered with service
		areas.

A Collaborative and Consultative Approach

One of the main objectives of the Guidelines is to provide clear direction, with a degree of flexibility, in creating building designs and development layouts that reflect the goals and policies of the Official Plan. This includes making a positive contribution to the 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 represents 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. Comments received, along with detailed responses, are contained in Attachment 2: Comment Matrix. An overview of the comments received 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, Case Studies, project highlights and staff contact information posted online for review
2. Online Survey: direct outreach to townhouse residents (including stacked and back-to-back townhouse types)	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 Meetings with BILD sub-group, April 1 and 12, 2016 Staff Presentation III: September 26, 2016 BILD comments received by letter October 28, 2016
4. Federation of North Toronto Residents Associations (FoNTRA)	Draft Guidelines circulated for review FoNTRA comments received by letter August 5, 2015. Further comments were provided via email on the August 2016 draft.
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 received by meeting minutes Staff Presentation III: October 4, 2016 DRP comments received by meeting minutes
6. Toronto Planning Review Panel (TPRP)	Staff Presentation and Panel Workshop I: January 23, 2016 TPRP comments received by meeting minutes Staff Presentation II: October 15, 2016 TPRP comments received by meeting minutes
7. 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

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8. City Staff Consultations	In addition to presentations to and discussions with City Planning staff throughout the study period, a workshop was held on January 21, 2016, with representatives from City Divisions including City Planning, Toronto Building, Engineering and Construction Services, Transportation Services, Toronto Fire, Solid Waste Services, Parks, Forestry and Recreation, Public Health and City Legal. Discussion comments compiled from staff notes. In addition, written comments were
	submitted by various Divisions and included in Attachment 2 of this report.
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The latest draft of the Guidelines has been modified to reflect the most recent comments of the various stakeholder groups (City Staff, DRP, TPRP, FoNTRA and the development industry). Most groups are satisfied with the current draft and would like to see the document approved and in use, with the exception of some development industry representatives. As with all projects of this nature, the Guidelines represent a balance of a variety of inputs and often conflicting perspectives.

Key changes that resulted from the consultations were:

- A modified introduction;
- A better organized and more user-friendly document with simplified and improved text, drawings, and photos;
- Further refinement of Section 2 Building Types and Section 6 Demonstration Plans:
- An elaboration on the guidance for the design and location of accesses to units;
- A simplified approach to determining building facing distances based on the separation increasing as the height increases;
- Case studies completion and relocation of the case studies from the document to on-line only;
- An improved understanding of potential/possible future amendments to Zoning Bylaw 569-2013; and
- Identification of the issues related to DIPS, as well as other City policies, standards and guidelines.

Outstanding concerns, from the development industry include:

- The document language, approach and guiding principles as being too restrictive/prescriptive;
- A desire to address housing affordability and transit supportive development by adding two more Guiding Principles;

- The cost and construction challenges of internalizing garbage and parking ramps within the building;
- A desire to be able to build private rather than public streets and lanes;
- Facing distances and setbacks which may limit the yield on a development site;
- The location/provision of shared indoor and outdoor amenity areas;
- The location/design of private outdoor amenity areas; and
- A need for a review and update of (DIPS).

The specific comments from all groups are identified and responded to in the Staff Response to Comments Received by Stakeholders in Attachment 2.

City Planning was directed to report back in May 2016. The reporting period was extended in order to conduct additional consultations. A substantial document reorganization and revision, followed by a second round of consultation, took place over the summer and fall of 2016. The finalized Guidelines contained in Attachment 1 integrate and balance a wide variety of stakeholder perspectives and align with the current policy framework and best practices for development of this type.

As the Townhouse and Low-rise Apartment Guidelines are further developed and refined during the proposed two-year monitoring period, it is City Planning's intention to continue with an open and consultative approach prior to bringing forth modifications or recommendations for Council consideration.

Development Infrastructure Policy and Standards (DIPS)

City Planning, through this report, has considered the November 2015 request to the Acting Chief Planner and Executive Director to report back on the unintended consequences that the current Development Infrastructure Policy and Standards has on low-rise infill development sites in the City of Toronto.

In 2004, the DIPS process was initiated to develop a range of standardized designs for new local residential streets. This examination arose in response to the growing concern that the amalgamated City did not have a uniform set of street design standards for public streets, and no standards for private streets. There was a concern that the mix of street standards from previous Municipalities did not consistently meet the more complex role assigned to public streets in the Official Plan. This was confusing to the development industry and consumed staff time in rethinking public and private street design site by site, based on different district levels of municipal service.

At that time, new townhouse developments were being designed, marketed and constructed as "freehold" townhouses using common element condominium private streets. There were no standards for private streets and the new Official Plan called for public streets. Many of these private streets had very narrow rights-of-way (ROW) and often did not meet the design objectives for new public streets including, no sidewalks or street trees, inadequate lighting and service/emergency vehicle access.

In addition to the operational and design concerns, developments on private streets were contrary to City policy as the Official Plan discourages the use of private streets on

lots which can accommodate the spatial needs of a public street. These concerns have been fully described in a joint report entitled "Development Infrastructure Policy and Standards Review" that was brought before Council at its meeting of April 12, 13 and 14, 2005.

http://www1.toronto.ca/City%20Of%20Toronto/City%20Planning/Developing%20Toronto/Files/pdf/D/DIPS%20staff_report.pdf.

DIPS provided for a range of design standards:

- New public local residential streets and the criteria for the use of the 20.0m, 18.5m and 16.5m ROW widths and associated turning circles (including narrower ROW widths for single-loaded streets);
- 6.0m ROW width for public lanes;
- New public streets to be generally achieved through a plan of subdivision process;
 and
- Exceptions (under limited conditions and circumstances) to the general policy that all new streets should be public streets, including design standards for private streets or mews.

Since this time, DIPS has been very successful in promoting better designed, safe comfortable, functional, appropriately scaled public streets. The new Complete Streets Guideline reinforces and supports existing DIPS standards. Over the next year, staff in all relevant Divisions will operationalize Complete Streets and will address some of the details within the DIPS standards including:

- Where to use the appropriate 16.5m, 18.5m or 20.0m wide street;
- Appropriate sidewalk locations, widths and winter maintenance;
- Accommodation of street trees and appropriate soil volume;
- Cul-de-sacs and hammer heads dimensions:
- Laneway design and maintenance; and
- Incorporation of green streets concepts.

In the meantime, DIPS provides companion standards to assist staff in the review of infill townhouses and low-rise apartment buildings.

Family-Sized Housing

In November 2015, the Committee also requested the Acting Chief Planner and Executive Director, City Planning to consider revising the language in the Townhouse and Low-Rise Apartment Guidelines that would require, without incentives, the development industry to:

- a. build family-sized housing units; and
- b. define what size best represents the definition of family-size units.

City Planning is of the view that these Guidelines are intended to apply primarily to the built form, site layout and exterior design of the development and are not meant to specifically address the interior lay-out and dimensions of townhouse developments.

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The Guideline establishes good urban design principles such as providing enhanced public realm, landscaping features, facing distances and outdoor amenity areas. These Guidelines also support a wide range of unit types and layouts, while further guidance on unit design and sizes can be found in the Growing Up: Planning for Children in Vertical Communities study - a study focussed on how new vertical, multi-unit developments can better accommodate households with children and youth.

Affordability

The Guidelines call for building facing distances to allow for adequate light, view and privacy. For the more intense apartment types such as stacked and back-to-back, hybrid and low-rise apartments, indoor/outdoor amenity space should be provided and parking ramps, access stairs, and garbage storage should be located within the building. The development industry has argued that this may reduce the yield on a site, thus affecting the industry's ability to offer a marketable, grade-related housing product.

Notwithstanding the proposed demands placed on the efficiency of a development site, low-rise housing types cost less to build relative to mid-rise and tall building types due to:

- Wood-frame construction;
- Review under the less onerous Part 9 of the Building Code;
- Greater saleable building areas (circulation/stair space within the unit can be included in saleable areas);
- Fewer amenities and shared spaces (i.e. hallways, lobbies);
- Typically no elevators;
- Often a faster development application turn-around time; and
- Greater densities than other low-rise housing types.

Some recent applications for stacked and back-to-back apartments have met the proposed Guidelines, demonstrating that it is possible to provide an affordable and amenable product.

As part of the Official Plan Review, City Planning is studying the existing large sites policy. The study is looking at the financial impact of including affordable housing in large developments. The study will inform the City's approach to securing new affordable housing through a revised large sites policy or through the implementation of inclusionary zoning, in the event that Bill 7, Promoting Affordable Housing Act, 2016 is enacted by the Province.

Conclusion and Next Steps

In general, the feedback received through the extensive and collaborative consultation approach indicates that the Townhouse and Low-rise Apartment Guidelines contained in Attachment 1 will provide the necessary guidance for a more comprehensive range of low-rise residential housing forms and related urban design issues, and will serve as a highly valuable and a much needed addition to the City's urban design guideline tool kit.

This report recommends that City Council approve the Guidelines as contained in Attachment 1 of this report for use in the evaluation of all existing and new townhouse and low-rise apartment applications. Following City Council's approval, City Planning staff will:

- Replace the 2003 Infill Townhouse Guidelines with the Townhouse and Low-rise Apartment Guidelines;
- Establish a monitoring program that will evaluate the effectiveness of the Guidelines over a period of at least two (2) years;
- Develop ways to incentivize or promote design excellence;
- Coordinate with the Five-Year Official Plan Review, "Urban Design Matters" to inform and advance low-rise building policies;
- Work with all relevant Divisions to operationalize Complete Streets and address some of the standards within DIPS in order to better align DIPS with the Townhouse and Low-Rise Apartment Guidelines and other relevant City policy and standards;
- Continue to work with relevant City Planning staff, City Divisions, industry stakeholders, residents' associations, the Design Review Panel and others in determining best practices and appropriate responses within the Guidelines; and
- Following the monitoring period, report back to City Council in the event that any further revisions to the Guidelines or related policies and implementation tools are warranted for Council consideration.

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ATTACHMENTS

Attachment 1: The Townhouse and Low-rise Apartment Guidelines

Attachment 2: Staff Response to Comments Received by Stakeholders

Attachment 3: Consultation Overview

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