

# TE19.2.71 and TE19.11.82

## HARBORD VILLAGE RESIDENTS' ASSOCIATION

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To: Toronto and East York Community Council

Re: TE19.11 and TE19.2.  
78-90 Queen's Park

Oct. 13, 2020.

Dear Members:

Harbord Village Residents' Association urges this Council to defer approval on the re-zoning proposal at 78-90 Queen's Park until a comprehensive evaluation and protection of the Queen's Park Legislative precinct can be completed.

The Council has two resolutions before it, linked by a development proposal. The first is the designation of two buildings on the western side of Queen's Park south of the ROM. The second is a proposal for an over-sized building that will be wedged between them.

The proposed institutional building is out of keeping with the existing northwest Queen's Park legislative precinct between Bloor and Hoskin, which includes the ROM, law, and music buildings. Citizens from across the City have risen in opposition. At issue the preservation of the existing Queen's Park landscape including buildings, open space natural features, mature trees, which has evolved sympathetically since the early part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, as against premature approval of an oversized building that will forever change that precinct.

The development's first entry to the approval framework took place two weeks ago when the Heritage Preservation Board considered a staff motion that recommended designation of Falconer Hall and Edward Johnson, two historic houses which would flank the new development (but did not designate Flavelle House because it did not touch the proposed building). By unanimous vote, the Preservation Board approved staff recommendations for the individual designations, but rejected language authorizing easements which would allow the new building to go forward. Instead, it recommended a precinct study be complete which would protect and define the historic context before considering this new building.

Before them, and hopefully carried forward in the file before TEYCC, were close to 100 letters from across the city, residents, architects, planners, heritage experts, and faculty. They identified the Queen's Park precinct as one of the last complete areas where historic buildings and sympathetic infill co-existed, a landscape precious to them and worth saving.

They saw the University's proposal for a blunt, 43-metre institutional building, wedged into a service roadway between Falconer Hall and Edward Johnson as overwhelming, not complementary. Their clear concern was the inappropriate massing of the new building, which, if approved, would disrupt and destroy the cultural heritage landscape of the northwest flank of

Queen's Park. The massing of the building, the presence of a truck ramp unnecessarily sized to accept large transport trucks, the loss of mature trees would forever change a streetscape they very much wanted to save.

The background to this is regrettable. From what we are able to determine, staff negotiated some reductions to what was an even more aggressive proposal with the University before significant community involvement took place. The present configuration was settled even before a working group began meeting. And now we learn, permissions extended to City Forestry's approval of the removal of mature trees *before* Planning, the Councillor and the community were satisfied with the public realm designs. As well, the entire project has been evaluated by Planning Staff by the standards of the University's proposed Secondary Plan which has not yet been passed by council and is not yet in force.

We have not seen this degree of pressure by the University to land a development in years. While many architects and planners complained privately of the proposal, too many of them told us they were constrained from speaking publicly because they could lose University work. Even the City's Design Review process was compromised when the panel was loaded with architects from the University itself, along with several who work regularly for the university, while an outside architect and regular member of the panel was excluded from speaking because he was a member of the community, and thought to be "prejudiced."

The community itself was not sufficiently alert to the real meaning of the proposal, so we, too, bear some responsibility. But it is only after studying the proposal for many months that its real importance became clear. In treating the building as a single project on a single site, we were all remiss.

That is no reason to go forward. We know now it is the precinct that matters, and what is built on this site should first and foremost fit.

Finally, it would be wrong to allow the power of the University to push through a development that could compromise a part of the City's cultural and historic legacy in face of today's uncertainty. Covid has changed the delivery of education, maybe permanently. Already, the University's operating revenue stream has been severely impacted. This is no time to rush through a development, particularly when there is high but avoidable risk that this proposal could disrupt this remarkably preserved and prized part of the City.

The Precinct Plan:

Capital cities like Washington, Ottawa, Halifax to name a few, have protections in place for significant heritage assets, like the Capital, the Parliament Buildings and the Citadel. Under the challenge of development, heights of new buildings and their impacts on the heritage framework and fabric, have long been an issue. Most, including Toronto, have implemented protected viewsheds. Others have addressed the need for regulations that ensure sympathetic transition to newer city elements.

But more recently, planners have re-framed the argument to conservation and protection of cultural heritage landscapes. A National Capital Commission (NCC) Region report expanded its evaluation to include “a sense of place.” This includes “the remarkable pattern of landform, vegetation, buildings and streets which combine to make a distinctive and memorable place.

“The forms of the buildings, circulation routes and landscapes... are predominantly picturesque. The buildings are individual objects, designed in the round to be seen from all directions, with space and landscape between them. Buildings combine to make architectural groupings and the landscape acts as an organizing matrix, defining and connecting the outdoor spaces.”

Just as Parliament Hill is dominant within the landscape of Ottawa, Queen’s Park and the University and its federated and affiliated colleges and universities have dominated the history and the spine of Toronto, the most significant north-south roadway in the City’s Downtown. Report after report of individual proposals, including the University’s new secondary plan, remark on the park-like setting, the need “to conserve and protect heritage resources.”

At least 25 buildings along the Queen’s Park spine have been listed or designated. The Queen’s Park-University Avenue axis has already been recognized in the TOCore Great Streets report, which seeks improvements to Queen-College to better recognize it as a significant landmark street. It recommended an evaluation of the College to Bloor section, with a particular emphasis on identifying features that contribute to the sense of place, generating guidelines for future development, ensuring infill respects the buildings and settings that frame the roadway.

In protecting the viewshed of Queen’s Park, staff, commenting on August 15, 2011 meeting of TEYCC on the OPA 2011 amendment to protect the views of the Ontario Legislative Assembly said:

Planning Staff agree with the findings of the Heritage Impact Assessment and Viewshed Analysis that the “Queen’s Park cultural heritage landscape is an extremely significant cultural heritage resource within the Province of Ontario” and would endorse the recommendation that the Queen’s Park cultural heritage landscape be designated by the Province of Ontario “in recognition of the site’s outstanding value within the Province of Ontario and to ensure its long-term conservation and appropriate management”. But it stopped short of doing more than protect the silhouette of the legislature building, viewed from College Street.

Concerned that protections were responding to applications on a site-by-site basis, heritage architects, planners, citizens and city politicians formed **The Ontario Capital Precinct Working Group**. It sought to bring Toronto and the Province together to develop and implement a precinct plan “that defines, protects and enhances the character, heritage attributes, cultural landscapes, accessibility, quality of design and quality of place of Ontario’s Capital Precinct and its related areas.” It called for a clear set of guidelines and regulations to govern development along the corridor from Queen to Bloor.

In many respects, we have been fortunate that north of College Street we have a landscape left to protect, one that has been used and occupied from the earliest times of human habitation along Taddle Creek, with buildings and a political historic context that dates back to Bishop

Strachan and the Family Compact, early religious divisions and buildings on the northwest and east side of Queen's Park that have deep roots in the history of women's advancement.

If we are not careful, we could lose it, site by site: many of the buildings are simply listed, the landscape is in the balance and more developments are on the horizon.

In 1825, the colonial town of York, population c. 10,000, set aside 166 acres on its northern shoulder, carved out of original park lots, for education. Close to 200 years later, we have a great university, a powerful provincial capital, a park setting with distinguished architecture, a sense of place, will we have the vision to act as good stewards.

Respectfully,  
Sue Dexter, Board HVRA  
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Appendix:

1. Listed and designated buildings in the Queen's Park precinct:

Location	date	status
ROM	1910	designated
Wymilwood Falconer	1901	listed
Flavelle	1901	listed
Wycliffe	1891	Designated
Indigenous landscape Hart House	Pre-european	Project underway
Hart House gothic quad	1919	designated
Stewart Observatory	1855	listed
Gerstein Sig Sam	1892	listed
Canadiana	1951	listed
McMurrich	1912	listed
Naylor Best Inst.	1954	Character supporting
Botany	1931	listed
Queen's Park Legislature	1886-92	listed
White Gouinlock	1903	intention
White stable		designated
Reuben Millichamp	1888	listed
Christie	1880	listed
Mason	1896	designated
St. Michael's	1929	listed
Victoria Burwash	1909	listed
Emanuel	1929	listed
Men's residence Victoria	1909	listed
Victoria College	1892	listed
Birge-Carnegie library	1908	listed
Massey Building	1908	designated

