



environmental  
defence

April 25, 2023

Planning and Housing Committee  
% Nancy Martins  
10th floor, West Tower, City Hall  
100 Queen Street West  
Toronto ON M5H 2N2

### **PH3.16: Expanding Housing Options in Neighbourhoods: Multiplex Study - Final Report**

Attention Planning and Housing Committee Members,

I am Counsel and Ontario Environment Program Manager for Environmental Defence, a leading national environmental organization that works at the federal, provincial and municipal levels to safeguard our freshwater, create livable communities, tackle climate change and build a clean economy. I lead Environmental Defence's policy development and advocacy regarding land-use planning, smart growth, sustainable housing and the protection of farmland and habitat in Ontario.

**Environmental Defence is strongly in support** of the recommendation from Toronto's Chief Planner and its Executive Director, City Planning to amend the Official Plan to permit duplexes, triplexes, and fourplexes in residential areas across the city and amend the citywide Zoning By-law to implement these permissions as-of-right in all residential zones across Toronto. We urge every member of this Committee, and every member of Toronto City Council to vote in favour of staff's improved draft Official Plan Amendment 649 and Zoning By-law 569-2013.

Rapidly increasing the number of households we actually accommodate in our existing neighborhoods - and especially on those low-traffic "residential" streets now reserved for single and semi-detached homes or townhomes, is the single most powerful move that Toronto City Council must make, within its own jurisdiction, to rescue Ontario's environment. Any councillor who votes against this OPA and zoning amendment, or who votes to water down or remove staff-recommended revisions designed to make multiplex units more viable (e.g., to subject multiplex to fsi restrictions, or to deny additional depth on narrow and/or deep lots) will forfeit any claim to be a friend of the environment.



That is partly because every extra household that Toronto neighbourhoods accommodate (in excess of the mere 700,000 new residents assigned to us by the provincial government) represents a piece of precious habitat and farmland not lost forever to the bulldozers. By maintaining rules that fail to incentivize creation the creation of enough homes on Toronto's low-car-traffic residential streets than there are people who want to live there, Toronto has been pushing vast numbers of would-be Torontonians into car-dependent, habitat-destroying, often oversized housing in the 905 - and even further afield. While delivering large numbers of multiplex apartments would not be sufficient - in itself- to end that entirely - it would reduce the harm we're causing tremendously.

Separately, though, housing large numbers of additional residents in compact, zero-parking homes on streets and blocks that are currently limited to "single detached" or semi-detached houses is an essential measure to improve the environmental performance - and quality of life - within those existing neighborhoods. Most of Toronto's "single detached" residential areas - and especially those first developed after World War II - lack the density (90-100+ people per hectare), the mix of incomes and mix of uses that is required to support all of the amenities, such as grocery stores, pharmacies high schools and community centres within easy walking distance. Many, if not most of these neighborhoods have actually declined significantly in population since 1971, and many neighborhoods in the Pre-WWII parts of the city, which originally had adequate densities have since lost them. Adding forms of housing that opening these streets to more people, and to households with a greater diversity of incomes and life-stages, is a vital step towards halting and reversing these declines, and retrofitting car-dependent post-war inner suburbs into walkable transit-supporting complete communities.

It is vital, for the purposes of achieving environmental and environmental justice benefits, that Toronto's multiplex policy actually deliver a large number of compact, zero-parking homes quickly and efficiently. That means constructing a regulatory and practical path of least resistance for any redevelopment on all (or almost all) existing "single detached" lots in Toronto that actually doubles, triples, or quadruples the number of households and individuals housed, and which sharply reduces the incidence of "McMansionization" development that merely replaces a older, modestly-sized detached home with a larger one.

To increase the likelihood that large numbers of multiplex apartments will actually be delivered, **Environmental Defence strongly supports staff's revisions** to the proposed OPA and Zoning amendments. Of particular note we support:

- eliminating the floor space index requirement as a separate constraint, over and above the prescribed building envelope restrictions, for multiplex homes. Prior to this revision to the draft policy, Environmental Defence was gravely concerned that the impracticalities of creating viable, liveable multiplex apartments within floorspace index restrictions on most Toronto lots would reduce "as of right" multiplex permissions to an empty gesture, and fail to



create sufficient incentives to built multiplex- rather than a McMansion, when any lot is being redeveloped

- the inclusion of Official Plan policy text that contemplates permitting expanded building envelopes for multiplexes *only*, and are not available to single detached houses;
- the inclusion of Official Plan policy that outlines expressly that zoning variances, such as additional height, or modified setbacks, may be granted to accommodate certain sustainable building features such as high-efficiency design, construction without a basement, and to ensure that existing by-law protected trees can be preserved without reducing the viability or number of multiplex units that can be created on a lot
- new regulations to facilitate the conversion of existing residential buildings to multiplexes, which would allow converted buildings to maintain the built form of the existing structure without having to comply with the zoning standards that would apply to a new multiplex. The amendment would also allow the conversion of existing parking spaces within a building to a dwelling unit.
- refinement of the interpretation policy to clarify that the proposed SASP would prevail over any other policy to the extent that the other would otherwise not permit a multiplex in Neighbourhoods
- regulations to clarify that duplexes, triplexes and fourplexes are permitted despite any restrictive prohibition in Chapter 900
- increase in the proposed as of right depth for multiplex apartment buildings from the original 14m to the proposed 17 metres minimum (for all properties), and to at least 19 metres for deep and/or narrow lots
- providing for an as of right height of at least 10 metres, and in every case no less than permitted for a detached house
- new regulations to facilitate the conversion - rather than simple demolition and replacement - of existing residential buildings to multiplexes, which would allow converted buildings to maintain the built form of the existing structure without having to comply with the zoning standards that would apply to a new multiplex
- a revision to allow the conversion of existing parking spaces within a building (i.e., integral garages) to a dwelling unit

As the leading Ontario-wide environmental NGO with a focus on land use planning and environmental justice issues, and an organization which has put a great deal of work into understanding the links between zoning, housing supply, density, affordability and environmental protection, Environmental Defence feels a particular responsibility to directly rebut the frankly misleading pseudo-environmental and affordability claims made by the Long Branch Residents Association and repeated in the pre-populated letter to target that it has urged its supporters to send. **All of the Long Branch Residents Association's requested changes to the draft Multiplex bylaw should be rejected**, because they would result in more sprawl, more car dependency, and *much greater loss* of trees (as well as wetlands, farmlands, grassland and other habitat) than the version recommended by the Chief Planner.



To begin with, it is simply misleading, even at the street level, for the Long Branch Residents Association to frame the draft OP and Zoning Bylaw amendments to permit multiplex housing as a threat to individual trees in what are currently single detached neighborhoods. Firstly, in our view, revisions to the rules are such that in the vast majority of those cases where a conventional multiplex footprint conflicts existing by-law protected trees, the proposal can be modified to preserve the tree without reducing the viability or number of multiplex units. Second, it is arbitrary to single out projects that add housing and prevent sprawl as a threat to trees. Driveways, parking pads, the proliferation of unauthorized impermeable paving in back and front yards, and the City's own practice of deferring to adjacent homeowners who prefer not to have a street tree planted in front of their property. all pose a much greater threat to existing trees, and to the expansion of tree canopy. Those of us concerned about tree canopy on our own streets should focus on combating these more serious threats.

Second, the watering down of the multiplex policy which they demand would significantly reduce the number of new homes created by the "as of right" multiplex permissions - with corresponding reductions in the potential of this initiative to curb sprawl, avert habitat destruction, and deliver sustainable densities.

- Firstly, retaining the Floor Space Index requirement for multiplex and limiting the depth of multiplex buildings to 17m, even when lots are deep or narrow, will make it much harder to deliver four large (1000sf), family-sized apartments of the sort that Toronto must provide in single in order to avoid pushing families into sprawl - and end our discriminatory practice of limiting new apartments for families who cannot afford a single, semi-detached or townhouse in Toronto, to streets with high car traffic.
- Second, in order to curb the squandering of scarce construction capacity on environmentally destructive McMansions, that when a lot is being redeveloped, there is an incentive to redevelop as a multiplex- rather than a McMansion. It is up to the City of Toronto to ensure the path of least resistance for builders leads to more homes, rather than a single, larger, more expensive one.

These amendments, which are expressly calibrated to "maintai[n] the lowrise character" of what are presently single detached streets, will not be *sufficient*, by themselves, to fix the inadequate population densities, car-dependency, high greenhouse gas emissions, and intolerable environmental injustice and discrimination created by decades of exclusionary zoning in Toronto's residential neighborhoods. In the near future, Toronto must do more to divert fa take measures to actually *change* and improve the character of low-rise "neighborhoods" by opening many low car-traffic, currently "single detached" side-streets to forms of conventional mid-rise housing that it currently restricts to "avenues". However



Official Plan Amendment 649 and Zoning By-law 569-2013, together with the recent removal of minimum parking requirements, represent an absolutely necessary, meaningful and laudable step in direction of the significant transformation our neighbourhoods need.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'P. Pothen', written over a horizontal line.

Philip Pothen, Juris Doctor, Master of Landscape Architecture  
Counsel & Ontario Environment Program Manager,  
Environmental Defence