



**MORE NEIGHBOURS
TORONTO**

Dear Members of the Planning & Housing Committee,

**RE: 2024.PH13.2 Villiers Island Precinct - City-Initiated Official Plan and Zoning By-law
Amendment - Decision Report - Approval**

About More Neighbours Toronto

[More Neighbours Toronto](#) is a volunteer-only organization of housing advocates that believe in building more multi-family homes of all kinds for those who dream of building their lives in Toronto. We advocate for reforms to increase our city's ability to build more homes in every neighbourhood. We are a big-tent organization with members across the political spectrum who are committed to counterbalancing the anti-housing agenda that has dominated Toronto's politics, created an affordability crisis, and cost burdened a new generation of aspiring residents. We are firmly committed to the principle that housing is a human right and believe Toronto should be inclusive and welcoming to all.

Position

More Neighbours Toronto supports the overall intent of the Villiers island plan to build a sustainable, walkable, and connected mixed-use community, with housing at all levels of affordability combined with supportive community infrastructure. We are encouraged to see the target of 30% affordable housing, the update of the Built Form policy to accommodate a tall building policy, the simplification of tower setback policies, and the removal of height limits. Taken together, these are positive changes that will accommodate more density and help build a vibrant and dynamic area of Toronto.

At the same time, we urge city council and planning staff to take this once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to build a truly dense, sustainable, and connected community that can be a beautiful place to work, live and play. In particular, there are two ways in which the plan could be improved to achieve a truly transformational neighborhood: (1) with **increased density**, and (2) through building a **network of pedestrianized streets**.

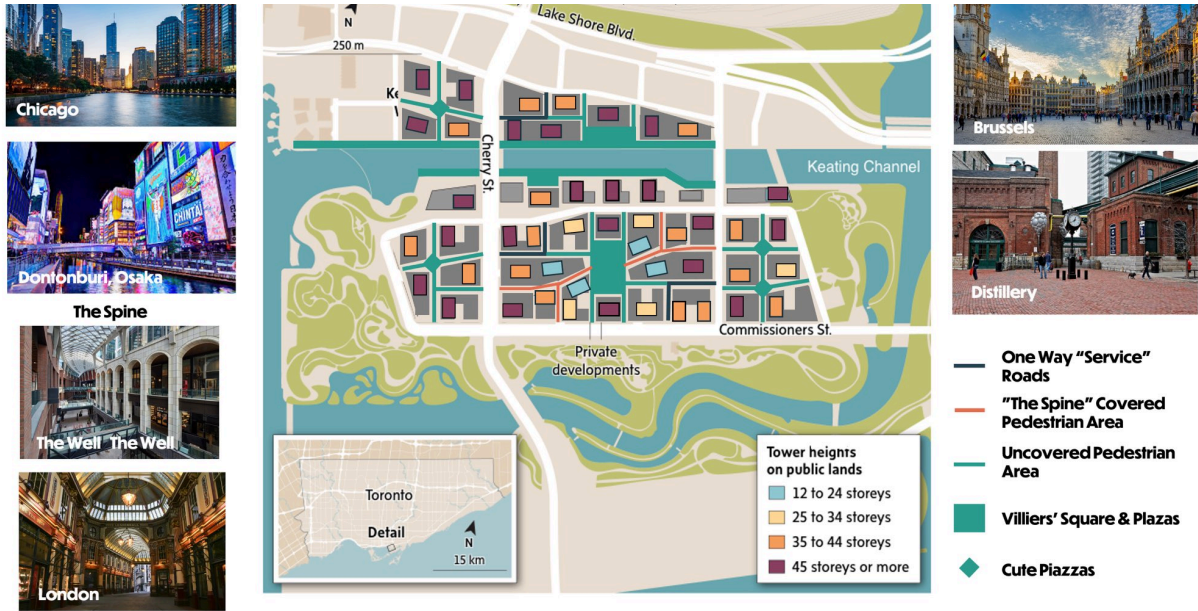
Increased Density: The current plan calls for a target of 9,000 residences, resulting in a net density of 7.7 times the area of the Island's development blocks. This target is far too low. As we stated in our 27 February 2022 letter to this committee, we urge City Council and Staff to support a target of **at least 12,000** residences, which will provide financial viability for at least 4,000 affordable units. In particular, we ask that City Council consider the following:

- **Increased density makes affordable housing viable:** As demonstrated through the HOUSING NOW programs, increased density (especially in a high-interest rate environment) is often necessary for affordable housing elements to be financially viable. Multiple sites that were rezoned by City Staff and approved by Council in 2019 are now

“On Hold”, awaiting additional density and Federal funding before they can proceed. These lessons should be learned for Villiers Island.

- **Villiers Island can accommodate increased density:** Of the 39.6 hectares comprising Villiers Island, only about one quarter (10.6 hectares) are dedicated to development blocks, with the rest reserved for parkland and the right-of-way. The gross FAR for the island is thus only about 2.0 - in contrast, the development at 2150 Lake Shore which is walking distance away from Villiers Island has a FAR of 6.0, which is three times as dense. While preserving parkland for recreation is laudable, the existence of so much open space means that Villiers Island can easily accommodate much more density, whether in the form of medium or high-rise buildings. Far from detracting from the space, density will add to the texture of Villiers Island and allows for more lively streetscapes.
- **Increased density builds a vibrant neighbourhood.** Fundamentally, accommodating more residents in Villiers Island means more people can enjoy its amenities. It expands the scope of affordable housing, taking a critical step to addressing Toronto’s housing crisis. A neighbourhood is created by people, not by its buildings.

Pedestrianization: With the creation of a landscape from scratch, City Council and Staff have a unique opportunity to create a network of pedestrianized streets so that residents can enjoy a quiet “inner” neighbourhood. Included below is an image of a vision for Villiers, which is not meant to be taken literally. It includes a European-style central plaza, and a vibrant walkable central area free from traffic and pollution. The base of the buildings are less massive, and the streets are narrowed to accommodate the potential for a covering - enabling year-round uses. The uncovered pedestrian plaza in the middle can accommodate events, patios, and other retail. The roads are not designed as typical blocks with straight avenues, but instead curve and change to create opportunities for architectural interest. Small service roads from New Cherry Street and New Munition Street can accommodate deliveries and pickups for businesses and residents. The purpose of this illustration is to highlight how More Neighbours believes more density can be achieved while also boosting quality of life and the vibrancy of the urban setting in a complementary fashion.



This network has international and local precedent, with successful cities around the world recognizing the value of a car-free plaza that residents and visitors alike can enjoy. With no legacy infrastructure holding this area back, City Council and Staff can afford to dream big and should be.

Villiers Island has the potential to be a truly world-class neighbourhood, one that all Torontonians can love and enjoy. We commend and applaud City Staff for all the work that has been done in producing the plan to-date, and for the revisions that have been made since 2017 that have further enhanced the project. With further improvements to the density and pedestrianization of the centre row, the Island can be a truly transformative feature of the Portlands.

Regards,
Hongyu Xiao,
More Neighbours Toronto