



GOODERHAM & WORTS

NEIGHBOURHOOD ASSOCIATION

June 11, 2024

**Planning and Housing Committee
Toronto City Hall
100 Queen Street West
Toronto, ON M5H 2N2
via email to: phc@toronto.ca**

To the Planning and Housing Committee:

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

Dear Chair Perks and Members of the Planning and Housing Committee:

I am speaking today on behalf of the Gooderham & Worts Neighborhood Association (GWNA) to express strong support to move forward swiftly with Planning Staff recommendations for amendments to Villiers Island Precinct Plan and related Official Plan and Zoning By-law amendments.

GWNA is a unified voice that serves the interests and enhances the quality of life for residents of the Historic Distillery District. We are located just a few minutes walk up Cherry Street from Villiers Island.

GWNA has worked closely with Waterfront Toronto through the conception, planning, design and redevelopment of the West Don Lands post industrial site immediately adjacent to our community over more than two decades. That positive firsthand lived experience has built strong trust in Waterfront Toronto's abilities to advance from a precinct plan with schematic design through detailed design and delivery, with high levels of effective public engagement throughout.

We are pleased to see the substantial increase in residential density, and particularly the numbers of affordable units envisioned for Villiers Island. Congratulations to the City of Toronto, CreateTO and Waterfront Toronto team for crafting plans that provide a 60% increase in the floor area for homes over the 2017 precinct plan. Having witnessed retail and restaurant businesses struggle in less populated new development, we are optimistic that the increased density on Villiers Island will help foster a vibrant mixed neighbourhood. As residents of decade old 40 storey buildings, flanked by new 50-60+ storey towers, the proposed heights between 19 and 46 storeys on Villiers Island seem reasonable for an area so close to Toronto's downtown core. We sense there may be potential to further increase density in future and are comfortable that could be addressed as needed in later phases of the multi-decade program. Comparing the 2005 West Don Lands precinct plan against units built to date and at advanced stages of design, we have observed a 50% increase in the number of units over the intervening 2 decades and anticipate more to come.



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We have seen Waterfront Toronto's approach deliver 20% affordable units with a mix of sizes and levels of affordability to serve diverse groups' needs in the West Don Lands. Given our city's current context of a broad and deep housing crisis, the step up to a 30% target for affordable housing planned for Villiers Island is essential. Considering the challenged track record of some other City affordable housing initiatives, such as HousingNow, we look forward to sober, realistic financial modeling as part of the imminent next stage Business and Implementation Plan work to ensure that desperately needed affordable homes get built on a timely basis.

The amended proposed plans' provisions for active mobility and pedestrians in rights of way is encouraging. We are eager to see a neighbourhood with thriving, human scale interior streets where people truly want to walk, linger, shop, have a coffee, catch up with friends, and live with kids, shielded from noise, pollution and dangers of speeding monster SUVs. With important facilities such as daycares, school, library and community centre distributed across the island, it is vital there be safe, walkable connections for kids through seniors. We find reassuring the language in the staff report that "streets are subject to further design" and the similar comments expressed in our conversations with City and Waterfront Toronto planning staff. Our volunteers stand ready to contribute, through stakeholder advisory committees, to the public realm design work ahead, elaborating the vision for pedestrian priority streets into people friendly designs.

On a related note, we urge the City to redouble its efforts to secure funding needed to build the Waterfront East LRT as the critical enabler of this new dense neighbourhood that will advance the City's laudable climate goals. Car-centric is simply not an option for an island with limited bridge access.

The "Meanwhile Use Strategy" to be intentional in managing otherwise vast swathes of empty land is an excellent idea to improve liveability for residents in the earlier phase buildings, and also accelerate the draw of the new island as a destination for others in the city to enjoy, helping to support new businesses.

Thank you for your consideration and support for pressing forward expeditiously towards delivering more badly needed affordable housing as part of a landmark new complete community in this unique area of our beloved city. With exceptional new river and lakefront parks poised to open, now is the time to capitalize on the massive investment in Port Lands Flood Protection to accelerate development that addresses our city's acute housing crisis. We look forward to welcoming many new neighbours to the area.

Sincerely,

Neil Betteridge
President
Gooderham & Worts Neighborhood Association
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cc: Deputy Mayor Malik, Councillors Fletcher, Moise and Perks; Mira Shenker, Waterfront Toronto; Anthony Kittel, City of Toronto