



December 2, 2024

City Clerk, Attention: Cathrine Regan, Administrator
Toronto and East York Community Council
2nd Floor West, 100 Queen Street West
Toronto, Ontario M5H 2N2

SENT BY EMAIL ONLY TO: teycc@toronto.ca

Dear Ms Regan:

Re: Planning Application Number 24 200889 STE 13 OZ
Request to Amend the Official Plan and Zoning By-law – 307 Sherbourne Street

The Cabbagetown Heritage Conservation District advisory committee urges the city to reject the proposed amendment for additional height to this building which has already become too massive for the site.

The Committee's Work

The site at 307 Sherbourne is directly adjacent to the Cabbagetown Southwest Heritage Conservation District, approved by City Council and due to come into effect by the end of 2024. The advisory committee whose volunteer members represent the fields of architecture, heritage planning, law, journalism and real estate, advises the City on applications for heritage permits in the heritage conservation districts in the Cabbagetown neighbourhood. The committee has been commenting on the iterations of the proposed building as it has changed over the course of several years.

The Site

Two heritage conservation districts meet at this site at the southeast corner of Sherbourne Street and Gerrard Street east. The site is part of the Garden District heritage conservation district, and is immediately adjacent to the Cabbagetown Southwest heritage conservation district approved by City Council and due to take effect by the end of 2024. The property immediately to the south of 307 Sherbourne Street – 297-299 Sherbourne Street – and the property immediately to the east – 201-203 Gerrard Street East – are both classified as “contributing property” in their respective heritage conservation district plans.

Planning Policies Affecting the Site

Official Plan Amendment No. 82 and its site-and-area specific Policy No. 461 identifies the lot at 307 Sherbourne Street as a tall building site. Tall buildings as defined by the City can be taller than the width of the street right-of-way, which for both Gerrard Street East and Sherbourne Street is 20 metres (66 feet) or six storeys. The policy creates the fundamental problem of inserting a tall building into Victorian streetscapes of two-to-three storeys in height. The intact row of houses from 259 Sherbourne Street northward to 297-299 Sherbourne Street is an outstanding example of Victorian residential architecture.

The official plan policy fosters a terminus to the row that is greatly out of scale in comparison to the existing streetscape. The policy also conflicts with the intent of both the Garden District Heritage Conservation District Plan (2021) and the Cabbagetown Southwest Heritage Conservation District Plan (2023/2024), whose purpose in each case is to preserve the area's historic character. The Cabbagetown neighbourhood, which extends to its historical boundary of Sherbourne Street, is acknowledged as one of the largest collections of Victorian housing and commercial blocks in North America, having survived the mid-twentieth century urban renewal schemes of many major cities. The corner site functions as a western gateway to Cabbagetown.

The Current Application

Through the succession of proposals for the site, the proposed building keeps getting taller. It was originally approved at 13 storeys, and later amended to 15 storeys despite our committee's objections. While construction has already started, the current applicant is now asking for permission to increase the building's height from 15 storeys to 18 storeys.

The elevations keep changing as well. Whether the building stands 15 storeys or 18 storeys, it will become a neighbourhood landmark – far surpassing any other nearby building in height. It will edge venerable Allan Gardens and force views of itself from the park.

While the community welcomes a redevelopment at this site, if a tall building has to be built at this very visible and historic location, excellence in its design is demanded. The current proposal is formulaic. It fails to reference its existing context and it offers banality when it could form a neighbourhood gateway and park terminus.

The building's footprint leaves very little usable outdoor amenity space at grade, inferring that Allan Gardens is meant to function as the building's primary outdoor amenity. At the same time, the building will cast shadows on the park, a prized public asset. It will also cast long shadows on private properties in the Cabbagetown heritage neighbourhood. The building's blocky massing – nothing like the slender point tower model envisaged in OPA No. 82 – worsens the building's shadowing effect.

The projecting bays of the four-storey base do not relate at all to the datum lines at the eaves and roof ridge on 201-203 Gerrard Street East, and it barely refers to the datum lines on 297-299 Sherbourne Street. The base's four-storey height ignores the height of adjacent 201-203 Gerrard Street East and 297-299 Sherbourne Street which stand two-and-a-half storeys tall.

Both the base and tower ignore the unit of scale established in the adjacent semi-detached house forms at 201-203 Gerrard Street East and 297-299 Sherbourne Street. Their unit of scale is not referenced in the articulation of the proposed building's Gerrard Street East and Sherbourne Street facades.

The tower's punched windows and the north elevation's spandrels as shown in the renderings fight against the tall building's inherent verticality. Even the adjacent small-scale buildings express a vertical orientation in their front elevations.

The two-storey cantilevered portion of the base fronting Sherbourne Street aggressively dominates over the intact row of Victorian houses to the south.

The cladding materials do not harmonize with the orangey-red brick that face 201-203 Gerrard Street East and 297-299 Sherbourne Street. These adjacent houses' use of brick patterning is a missed opportunity at the proposed building.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The city should reject the request to amend the Official Plan and zoning bylaw to allow additional height for this building which is already become too massive for the site.

It is expected that applicants for new development show serious consideration for the objectives and policies contained in a heritage conservation district plan. The current proposal at 307 Sherbourne Street does not meet the policies of the Garden District Heritage Conservation District Plan, among which is:

"7.6.1 New development and additions to non-contributing properties within the George, Pembroke, Sherbourne, Gerrard and Shuter Street character sub-areas shall be designed to be compatible with the scale, height, massing and form of adjacent contributing properties, and the District's heritage attributes, particularly with respect to the heritage attributes associated with each character sub-area."

High-rise construction in an established low-density residential area such as the environment into which the proposed building must fit is never recommended as a conservation strategy. However, in this case where the City chose 307 Sherbourne Street as the location for a tall building, an architectural solution that graces the corner location is required.

There are instances of high-rise buildings that respond better to their existing historic streetscape than the majority, and the City should provide the applicant with examples in

Toronto and elsewhere. We identify the contemporary high-rise project at 513-517 Yonge Street as an example worth studying.

Our committee is ready to assist the City and the applicant in revising the a project at 307 Sherbourne Street to better respect the character of the Sherbourne Street and Gerrard Street East streetscapes and creates a suitable view terminus to Allan Gardens.

Yours sincerely,

Wallace Immen, Chair
Cabbagetown Heritage Conservation District Advisory Committee

WI/PD/mk/hb

Attach.

c.c. Councillor Chris Moise
Jeremy Humphrey, Senior Planner, Community Planning
Mary MacDonald, Senior Manager, Heritage Planning
Adam Wynne, Toronto & East York Community Preservation Panel