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July 18, 2019

Hello Peter, Alain and David,

After speaking with residents and the community association, and considering recent issues at City Hall, we have some concerns that we will seek to address as we move on to the next stage of the process for the Bank Street in the Glebe Height and Character Study.

Throughout this process, we have been assured that this still-to-be-develop plan will—because it will become part of the Official Plan—“have some teeth”. We have been told this, and we have said this to residents.

Unfortunately, with the recent decision by city staff, the Planning Committee and City Council to completely disregard a thoughtful and clear Secondary Plan for Old Ottawa East, a plan that was developed collaboratively with the community and a major developer, we now have serious concerns about the weight the new Bank Street plan will have in future planning decisions.

We understand that developers always have the opportunity to ask for amendments to plans, but since such requests seem like a mere formality, ensuring that we develop strict—and restrictive—guidelines is now all the more paramount. Because these plans are so readily compromised, we cannot compromise now.

We know developers will always seek to take a mile, so we can't afford to give them an inch.

With that in mind, we have developed a list of concerns that should inform the final outcome of this project so that we can support it.

Concerns About the Outcome of the Study

Lot-by-lot Zoning

We appreciate the detailed, on-the-ground approach your team is taking to this project. We know that you are considering multiple aspects of the street and the properties that fall within the study area. Further, we understand the complications that can come from the varying lot sizes and depths. However, we are concerned about getting too granular in the zoning.

Splitting up the street into sections may make sense (though there are questions about the way the sections have been split up); however, identifying specific lots that could be granted extra height is not something we are inclined to support.

We see a need for greater unity along the zoning of the street, both for the city-building aspects, but also to maintain the integrity of the plan, as a whole. One of our biggest problems these days is with spot rezoning. One lot is granted a little extra height because “it's a difficult lot” or “it has the pace” or “it makes sense here”. Unfortunately, that extra height (often without new density) becomes the defacto new zoning regulation for the entire neighbourhood.



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We understand there is no official policy declaring this, but it is what we currently live with. The height of the Lord Lansdowne was used as justification for the height at Lansdowne Park. The height at Lansdowne Park and the Lord Lansdowne was used as justification for extra height at the 890-900 Bank Street proposal.

Spot zoning becomes precedent. We do not want to mistakenly enshrine such a system of precedent into the new plan.

Embedding Developer Business Models into the Official Plan, Implicitly or Explicitly

There is concern regarding the decision to increase the height limit for developments north of First Avenue. South, the current recommendation is for four storeys, but to the north it is six. We understand the reasoning—an under-used lot like the current Boston Pizza building should be redeveloped. However, the current building provides a revenue stream to the owner, so a redevelopment plan would have to provide *more* income than the current building for it to make “business sense” to implement.

We have heard this sort of argument before, that a certain building needs to be built higher than zoning allows (the economics always seem to demand just a few more storeys than is allowed). However, we never see any financials. We never see the full business plan. The economic case is never explained. It is our contention that these claims are regularly specious. It's a convenient way to accrue more profits at the expense of the community desire for consistency.

As many have noted, as long as the price of the land has not already baked in an assumption that City Hall will permit six storeys, there is nothing inherently impossible about building four storeys successfully.

If the Boston Pizza lot is zoned for four storeys, no doubt a developer will say they have to build six storeys to make the finances work...and, no doubt, if we say the lot is zoned for six storeys, a developer will say they need to go to eight storeys to make the financials work.

(And, no doubt, city council will be inclined to give them what they ask for. At the very least, we can't start out the negotiation in a compromised position.)

We cannot assume that the feedback we receive from developers is accurate; they are hardly disinterested parties. Further, we certainly cannot assume that the economics of development will remain static throughout the life of this plan.

We cannot zone for vacuum-tubed mainframes when everyone will be using MacBook Airs in a generation.

Lack of Planning Studies to Support Draft Recommendations

We are concerned about the lack of planning studies presented to the public. Residents need to understand what planning studies are being undertaken and when those results will be available to the general public. This information is necessary for residents to be able to review and analyze any draft recommendations.



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Residents and the community association are concerned that they are being asked to put in much time and effort to review plans and recommendations without this vital information. For example, how can we properly judge proposed heights and setbacks without sun/shadow studies? These must be provided before we move to any next stage.

Lack of Clarity Regarding Draft Recommendations

People are, naturally, very interested in the proposed height limits for Bank Street, and we appreciate receiving preliminary recommendations. However, there are other aspects to this study for which we are missing recommendations. There was discussion regarding rear yard setbacks, but we are waiting for specific recommendations. In addition, it would be useful to see not just one set of recommendations, but multiple possibilities for comparison.

For example, the community association asked that buildings stepback a minimum of 2.5 m after the 3rd storey (rather than 2m after the 4th storey, which is as per current TM but largely ignored as well). Is this being considered? Has it been rejected?

Human Scale

We are pleased that much discussion has been brought to the notion of the human scale and the cadence of the street. However, we are unsure whether this has been effectively communicated, both in terms of intent and how we hope to achieve that intent. For example, the issue of limiting store sizes came as a bit of a surprise. We understood (and support) the desire to have smaller store fronts to allow for a more engaging and alluring street front, but store size does not necessarily equate to that.

We have experience in the neighbourhood of stores being tucked into small or odd-shaped spaces. The Home Hardware is shaped in an "L", maintaining the cadence of the street. The old McCrank's store is tucked in behind JAM Cereal. Irene's has a vary narrow face on the street, but stretches far back, opening up in the rear and expanding onto a patio. Mrs. Tiggy Winkles and Lost Marbles form a two-storey store. This sort of creativity should be nurtured, and we'd hate to see it leave the neighbourhood.

We've received more correspondence on this and we want to be sure that any plan we devise allows for local businesses to flourish, but not limit innovation in space. How can we do this?

Concerns About the Process of the Study

Continuing Opacity of the Study Workplan

Prior to beginning this project, the community association asked for a workplan so that they could provide comments. This would be a means of ensuring there would be as few surprises as possible, and allow for developing a more fruitful approach to the study (that, hopefully, could be replicated for other studies). The community association is unsure of schedule for when they expect to do any reasonable analysis (GOHBA apparently also thinks that we need some objectives measures to evaluate the recommendations).



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Engagement at the Open House

As was expressed at the Open House, the community is concerned with only allowing three questions following the presentation. The community wants to have a wider discussion, so that residents may hear and learn from other residents in order to develop a more communal understanding of the issues at play. Having one-on-one consultations in the open house style can be beneficial, but it is clear the community seeks a different approach for future consultations.

Is Intensification a Primary Goal of the Study?

There has been confusion about intensification being used to justify increased height limits in certain sections. With an understanding that the city is growing, it was not understood by the community that this plan would explicitly be a tool for intensification. We seek clarity on the role intensification plays in this study. Are we seeking to increase density, or are we simply considering the growth the city will experience?

Heritage

Some very salient comments have been received about the protection of the heritage along this street. We will have more to say but in general, exceptions should be very minimal when it comes to allowing changes to the heritage characteristics of this street (and behind the street for extra homes included in the study). We will have more on this.

Conclusion

We believe that a thoughtful, intentional, considerate plan for Bank Street will help ensure the livability and vitality of the neighbourhood for generations to come. We are ok if this takes longer than initially intended to be sure we get this right and receive widespread buy in. Considering the ongoing history of the planning and development reality in the City of Ottawa, we submit that added vigilance is required to protect the integrity of the plan and the future of the neighbourhood.

Sincerely,

Shawn Menard,
City Councillor, Capital Ward

Sarah Vieback
President, Glebe Community Association

Carolyn Mackenzie
Chair, Glebe Community Association Planning Committee