

Bloor-Dundas 'Avenue' Study Open House Meeting #3

Date & Time: November 18, 2008 @ 7:00 pm
Location: Saint Joan of Arc – Gymnasium (1701 Bloor Street West)
Attendance: Approximately 35 members of the Local Advisory Committee and general public
Councillor Gord Perks, Shana Almeda
City Staff: Corwin Cambray, Kevin Edwards, Andrea Old
Consultant Team: Anne McIlroy & Shima Mirkarimi, Brook McIlroy Planning & Urban Design/Pace Architects

1. Introduction

On Tuesday, November 18, 2008, the City of Toronto, in conjunction with the consulting team of Brook McIlroy Inc./Pace Architects hosted an Open House in the Gymnasium of Saint Joan of Arc for the Bloor Dundas Avenue Study. This was the third meeting in a series of meetings as part of the Bloor Dundas 'Avenue' Study, Public Engagement Process.

1.2 Purpose

The purpose of the meeting was to present the feedback from the design charrette on September 20, 2008 and meetings with the LAC representatives and to continue the community discussion on the future of this stretch of Bloor Street and Dundas Street.

1.3 Attendees

Over 35 people attended the meeting including residents, property owners, business owners, representatives of community groups and members of the Local Advisory Committee. The meeting was also attended by the Ward Councillor, Gord Perks, and the Member of Provincial Parliament, Cheri DiNovo.

1.4 What was Presented?

Councillor Gord Perks and Corwin Cambray, Senior Planner with the City gave an introduction to the study summarizing the process to date and what to expect as the study moves forward. A presentation by Brook McIlroy/Pace Architects followed and included:

1. Community Priorities
2. Design Workshop Results – Exercises #2 & 3
3. Emerging Area Framework
 - Open Space & Connections
 - Character Areas & Constraints
 - Built Form
 - Opportunity Sites & Conceptual Urban Design

Note: The presentation did not include a discussion of the Bloor Street West R.O.W. due to time constraints. However, the slides and boards related to the R.O.W. options are posted under the "Community Meeting - Tuesday November 18, 2008" section on the study's web page at <http://www.toronto.ca/planning/bloordundas.htm>

2.0 Community Input / Q & A Summary

The evening's presentation allowed for two discussion breaks where attendees were given a chance to ask questions. The following section is a summary of the questions and comments that were raised during the presentation.

Q: Board 3 proposed the occasional high-rise. What sorts of heights came out of the previous meetings?

A: Taller buildings have been defined as anything higher than a mid-rise building. On Bloor Street this would be buildings that are taller than 7-8 storeys. On Dundas Street these are buildings taller than 5-6 storeys.

Q: What do you mean when you say "we"? Is it the City? The consultant team? The developers?

A: That includes all of us in the room. These findings are based on what we have heard from residents, property owners, business owners, representatives of community groups, members of the LAC, City of Toronto Planning staff etc.

Q: The Giraffe proposal does not adhere to the 1:1 ratio. What assurances do we have that proposals like that won't win at the OMB in the future?

A: The reason developments come forward with proposals like the Giraffe is because this type of Avenue Study work has not been done before for this stretch of Bloor Street West. The completion of this Avenue Study will set the rules for developments in the future.

Q: What is the process of introducing streets in areas like the Loblaw's site that do not have any streets? Will they line up with adjacent streets?

A: Since these lands are privately owned with a number of owners, any application that comes forward will have to consider how it will work with the rest of the adjoining properties.

Q: Is it possible to put some guidelines in place for future development to follow?

A: The Avenue Study report will include Urban Design Guidelines.

Q: High-rise and mid-rise should be defined clearly in terms of number of storeys.

A: High-rise and mid-rise are dependent on the right-of-way width.

Q: How do recommendations impact the final decisions? How does an Avenue Study work?

A: The Avenue Study will be produced based on the public consultation process and conversations between City staff and the consultant team. Council will then have to vote on the consultant's report. If adopted, the Avenue Study will direct the City's updated zoning by-law provisions for the area.

This process will allow us to think about what we want as a community and what we think will work in the neighbourhood and what won't. However, this doesn't preclude individual owners from putting in an application for a building that is taller than the Study's recommendations. However, with an Avenue Study in place, the City will have the tools and the regulations to argue for development that is designed to fit within the neighbourhood context.

Q: First of all, thank you for incorporating our comments. The green lines on Dundas what does that actually mean? They are smaller than the ones on Bloor Street. What kind of boulevard will be there?

A: Bands of green on Bloor Street versus Dundas Street reflect the right-of-way width. It does not mean the treatments will be different, but sidewalks are narrower. There will be some constraints that determine how much and what can be done in those areas such as the narrower sidewalks.

Q: Will there be any new space added to the Bishop Marroco Playing field? (The green space needs to be visible from Dundas)

A: We've repeatedly heard that you want a strong park identity. Unfortunately we can't design what it will look like exactly but connectivity and linkage is all very important and will be raised in the final Study document.

Q: When the Study is completed, the City will propose a change in the zoning by-law. Any property owner can raise an objection and go to the OMB if they want. This will especially be a problem because now we've highlighted areas that can accommodate taller buildings. The community has entered into a risky process since we've put these properties on the table.

A: Yes, you are right in a sense. When you start a conversation people will come forward but before we didn't have a tool. Avenue Studies are identified in the Official Plan as a tool for directing and managing growth in certain areas of the city. We are using the best tool in the tool box. If we don't do this, then developers can argue that since the Official Plan has identified this area as an Avenue (an area of intensification) than they can go ahead and build any where they want. This is our chance in advance of developers coming in and proposing inappropriate development to identify what we value and what we want our neighbourhood to look like.

Q: One of the concerns we have had all along with the 1:1 ratio is that on the north side of Bloor because of the train tracks buildings can be taller and there will be an over development of the north side. We should take that into account as development should relate to the south side of Bloor Street.

A: In general, there needs to be a balance street wall on the north and south. Because of the relationship to adjacent neighbourhoods, the north side of Bloor Street does have opportunity that the south side does not. It is important though that meaningful setbacks and step-backs at the podium level and above are achieved.

Q: The statements you are making are they statements from you? The community? The City?

A: The statements in the presentation are taking what we have heard and presenting them in a format that could potentially be recommendations in an Avenue Study.

Comment: The Loblaw's site is the largest site. A new community can be developed. The City of Toronto wants to encourage families to move to the downtown. Families want front doors not apartments. This site provides an opportunity for a front door neighbourhood. We should maximize the use.

Comment: Buildings taller than three-storeys should provide the same square foot space as their ground floor for public use. Buildings should step out starting at the base (i.e. an inverse step-back).

Q: I have hostility for tall buildings. I'm scared of this neighbourhood turning into St. James Town.

A: In the City's Official Plan, Avenues are identified as areas of intensification. In the Avenue Study we can decide what we value about this community and in doing this we have to be realistic. However, "taller" doesn't necessarily mean towers. Taller buildings can be

accommodated if the context is right. There needs to be some trade-offs. Opportunities will be wasted if we recommend single-family houses here.

Q: How can we engage in this process so that great architecture can occur instead of bad architecture? How do we ensure it?

A: Good architecture is something we can't ensure. However we can provide a chance for better architecture and the right framework might attract better architecture. The Urban Design Guidelines can also support the City when considering applications.

Q: Taller buildings are a good opportunity for green roofs.

A: The Loblaw's site can be a good pilot project to demonstrate green technology.

Q: On the slide there are taller buildings next to the single storey homes on the Loblaw's site. Central location of tower buildings is a mistake. Maybe taller buildings are not necessary. Maybe buildings with larger bases are better. Can buildings with larger bases be realistic?

A: Mid-rise buildings may or may not be good enough to achieve the density.

Comment: Who is going to be living in these single family homes? We don't have any transitional housing to accommodate people who can't necessarily afford a single family home in downtown Toronto. There are arguments to be made for more diverse demographics. What we need to ask ourselves is what sort of neighbourhood we will be looking for in the next 10 years.

Q: This area is a neighbourhood with kids. If we are preserving the distinct character of the neighbourhood, these large sites can provide single family housing.

A: Seventy-five percent of Toronto is not within the intensification/growth area (i.e. Avenues and Centres). We need to put on a lens of reality, entirely low-rise development on a large site such as the Loblaw's site is not realistic.

Comment: We should decide what we actually want. If we make concessions it would be nice to know we'll get them.

Comment: We need to crank this as far as we can. Neighbourhoods can be diverse. People can age in place. Front door accommodation can be triplexes. We need to look at more alternatives for this site to accommodate density. If we need to accommodate them or else there will be sprawl. If we want density, we need to find ways to accommodate it.

Comment: Our area is screaming for development, there are a lot of people for development in the neighbourhood. The six-storey scale of development is good for families.

Comment: There is a huge difference between six and twelve-storeys.

Comment: Why do the high-rises have to come here?

Comment: Wish the existing buildings were shown. Need more contexts to understand the plans on the Loblaw's site.

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