

2500 Bloor Street West

Prepared by OU November 8th, 2008

Working Group Meeting Four – November 6, 2008: Meeting Notes

Working Group Meeting Four, concerning the lands at 2500 Bloor Street West was held at The Old Mill Inn & Spa in Toronto, November the 6th of November, 2008, at 7:00 pm.

Opening Remarks and Introduction

This fourth and final Working Group Meeting was intended to be a culmination of the work done thus far. The process began in June 2008 with an initial Meet and Greet, followed by three Working Group meetings where a review of existing conditions and official plan policies relevant to the site took place, a visual preference survey was undertaken and guiding principles for the site were produced, and a presentation was made of four massing scenarios, in response to the principles generated in previous working group meetings.

Between Meeting Three and Four, Working Group members liaised with their memberships to discuss the four proposed massing scenarios. Each group undertook this task in a unique way; in some instances, a virtual conversation was held following the analysis of the online materials, and participants provided feedback. In other instances, several meetings were held generating dialogue and notes (see appendices).

Meeting Four Format and Goals

One or sometimes two representatives from the various groups presented the comments generated from the discussions held with their respective groups. A general discussion followed. It was outlined at the onset of the meeting that it was expected that, in some instances, there would be an overlap of comments and ideas, however the intent was to hear from each group.

The goal of the evening was to provide Working Group Members with an opportunity to respond to the massing scenarios in a substantive way, based on the feedback generated from their member organizations and constituencies. The entire agenda was reserved for these presentations.

Presentations

Bloor Jane Humber Resident's Group

The representatives who presented on behalf of the Bloor Jane Humber Residents Group thanked the team for this unique opportunity to share their views and be part of the development of the Humber-Bloor area. They held a meeting with about 12 residents, as well as residents of the Brule

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Condominium. They appreciated the chance to present their core concerns regarding the scenarios to the consultant team and the Working Group.

A key concern was that the traffic congestion that currently exists would be exacerbated by the potential of added density, and existing issues would be magnified. While traffic has been an issue in the past, residents feel that traffic problems are intensifying, and increased volumes are creeping into neighbourhood streets. Members of the group feel that, at present, vehicles turning left from Old Mill Drive and Riverside Drive are of concern, and the lack of traffic lights from South Kingsway to Old Mill Station encourages speeding, forcing police to frequently set up speed traps.

It was noted that the lands at both 2490 and 2500 Bloor Street West are on a steep grade, which may exaggerate perceived building height.

All residents who provided feedback for the Bloor Jane Humber Residents Group felt that 10 storeys would be too high. Each proposed building mass, whether elongated or tall, was seen by the Bloor Jane Humber Residents Group as being too dense and out of scale with the rest of the area. It was unanimous among this group that the 12-15 storey scenario would not be acceptable.

Initially, members of the Bloor Jane Humber Residents Group were excited to see this site as a potential gateway to Bloor West Village. After some consideration, they are seeing it in a reverse light, and feel that 2500 and 2490 Bloor Street West are separate from Bloor West Village, more closely relating to the natural Humber gateway and the adjacent residential area. While opposite of what they initially expressed – the Bloor Jane Humber Residents Group feels that it is important for the character of this development to speak to the character to the west.

A representative from the Bloor Jane Humber Residents Group noted that there was a strong negative response to the slab-like buildings, such as the west building mass proposed in Scenario 1. There was a positive response among the group to the proposed widened sidewalks and high quality landscaping, and all residents felt that it would benefit the street if both buildings were possibly set back in the same way. At the time of the meeting, they did not feel that they could provide adequate comment on parking and servicing.

Although Scenario 1 appeared to be the most balanced scenario for this group, there was concern that the C-shaped building on the east side of Scenario 1 might result in undue noise for residents in the area, and undesirable activities could take place in the park at night.

Regarding Scenario 2, the proposed plaza on the east building was not favoured by the Bloor Jane Humber Residents Group. Potential heights for all buildings was a concern. Members of the group felt as though the suggested placement of the building was too close to the north side of the site. It was expressed that the Bloor Jane Humber Residents Group would like to see residential at-grade uses as opposed to commercial, which they originally expressed as desirable. They expressed concern that if commercial at-grade uses were incorporated to the proposed properties, those businesses may not thrive.

With respect to Scenario 3, the proposed transitioning was identified as desired, although the tower is not.

Proposed Massing Scenario 4 was not endorsed by the Bloor Jane Humber Residents Group in any way, due primarily to the height of the towers.

Jennifer Keesmaat clarified with the representatives from the Bloor Jane Humber Residents Group to confirm that they felt Scenario 1 had the most desirable aspects, which they did.

Bloor West Village Residents Association

Prior to the November 6th meeting, the Bloor West Village (BWV) Residents Association had minimal contact with their constituents and did not have the opportunity to meet as a group. They did upload information on the organization's website, and were able to thereby obtain feedback from some members. However, the BWV Residents Association Executive did discuss the proposed massing scenarios, and a representative presented some high level points.

The corner plazas proposed in Scenarios 2 & 3 were identified as a potential issue in the winter and during transitional seasons, due to the possibility of a lack of activity.

A more residential character was identified as preferred for this area, although convertible uses at grade should also be considered.

Larger, wider landscaped boulevards were suggested as a possible amenity. Expanded sidewalks, similar to the one in front of the Starbucks at Bloor and Ellis Park Road, function well – people are drawn to the space, and give it life.

Concern was expressed about proposed heights in the scenarios. A structure taller than 8 storeys, it was suggested, might set a new precedent in the village. It was acknowledged that tradeoffs for public spaces and amenities would be proposed for height, but the public spaces would need to be substantive for this trade-off to be considered to be of value to the area residents.

A slab building was identified as an undesirable typology; whereas stepped massing, particularly towards the residential area to the north side, is desired. 4 storeys was suggested as a maximum height at street level, in keeping with the rest of BWV. The overall site should be considered a transition zone to the housing to the west.

The representative speaking on behalf of the Bloor West Village Residents Association finished by thanking Tridel and those involved in the process, stating, "We are grateful that you decided to consult us."

Old Millside Residents Association

The Old Millside Residents Association (OMRA) elicited feedback by sending an email out to their membership, asking individuals to look at the proposed massing scenarios and hosting a meeting which used the Evaluative Toolkit provided by Office for Urbanism as a guideline. Those unable to attend sent their comments via email, which were then incorporated with notes taken at the meeting. A representative from OMRA consolidated the feedback into one document, which was sent out to those in attendance for final approval; and the representatives of OMRA feel confident that there is consensus among the group.

It was noted that OMRA members felt the scenarios did not include sufficient detail, such as number of units, parking spaces, and other items, for them to provide a comprehensive evaluation.

Traffic remained an outstanding issue for members of OMRA, and increased traffic flowing into

adjacent neighbourhoods was a primary concern. Unless further traffic calming is initiated, OMRA is concerned that Old Mill Drive will be used to accommodate an influx of vehicles, encouraging circulation into the neighbourhoods. One possible recommendation offered by OMRA included introducing a system of one way streets, and incorporating new traffic lights near the site.

OMRA did not feel comfortable endorsing one plan over another, seeing positives and negatives for each of the proposed scenarios. OMRA felt that Scenario 2 was aesthetically pleasing, and that the plaza could be an attractive feature; providing a better view to Bloor Street, accommodating a restaurant or café, and offering function to the local community.

All four of the proposed scenarios were noted as being too high among this constituency. OMRA recommends a complex lower than the heights proposed in the massing scenarios, in keeping with the existing Bloor West Village identity. Although OMRA is aware that a 10 storey building was approved at Jane and Bloor, they recommended that this building be kept lower, arguing that Jane and Bloor is a major intersection. While the group recognizes this site as a gateway, new development should not overshadow the river, which is a natural gateway.

OMRA was of the opinion that it would be better to have the bulk of the massing on the east property, given that the east block is closer to the Bloor/Jane hub, and also has a parking lot behind it.

While OMRA was not opposed to having at-grade commercial uses, concern was expressed about the viability of retail. OMRA felt that businesses here would need to offer something exceptional to encourage people to take the extra steps beyond Bloor/Jane.

The widened sidewalk could be applied to Scenario 2, taking advantage of the opportunity to enhance the public realm and Traymore Park. The proposed enhanced entrances are also desirable, and the park should be incorporated as much as possible with safe walkways, and features such as a skating rink, in order to optimize use of the park.

Bloor West Village BIA

The Bloor West Village (BWV) BIA did not have a meeting with their membership concerning the proposed massing scenarios, but spoke with key players within their organization on an informal basis. It was noted that the BWV BIA has 38 years of consistent understanding and cooperation with local residents; and as business people, feel that the more people that live in the area, the better. So while the BWV BIA wants to make sure that the development is good for business, they also respect the views and concerns of the residents in the area.

While there are a number of local issues that the BWV BIA has chosen not to get involved in, they do play a key role in the development of the area. They initiated the 2004 Bloor West Visioning Study, and are of the opinion that when the local business community is successful, it enhances the fabric of the neighbourhood.

Regarding the proposed massing scenarios, the BWV BIA assessed each scenario from a business perspective. In Scenario 1, concern was raised about the double row of trees, and handling of snow banks in the winter. From their experience, expanded sidewalks often involve greater maintenance.

The BWV BIA favored the sidewalks featured in Scenario 4. The BWV BIA feels that being stuck in the

corner of a plaza is seen as undesirable by store owners. Further, more on-street parking is required to make commercial operations more viable.

Swansea Area Ratepayers Association (SARA)

The Swansea Area Ratepayers Association (SARA) spent time assessing the information, putting in approximately forty volunteer hours. Members of the SARA executive do not take a position without consulting their membership, and thus prepared a user-friendly package and organized a meeting within their organization, which attracted between 40-50 people on an election night.

SARA provided a ranking system synopsis and a brief written summary of their findings and comments (see appendices). SARA will not endorse a site plan with buildings higher than 8 storeys, “unless traffic movements in the Bloor West Corridor between Old Mill and Jane and in particular the interface between Old Mill and Riverview and South Kingsway and the corridors are resolved so as to discourage traffic infiltration from the neighbourhood”.

SARA representatives indicated that Bloor West Village has a particular character, a feeling of humanity, pleasant sky views, and an average height of 3 storeys; the precedent this might set was flagged as a concern. There is a willingness among the SARA executive to consider alternative options, only if sufficient benefits are identified.

The scenarios featuring an expanded sidewalk were viewed as most desirable by SARA, followed closely by the east plaza, while the west plaza was not voted as desirable. The proposed midblock pedestrian linkage was also viewed as negative by the group, as SARA felt as though it would be too narrow to function successfully, and it was perceived to be too narrow to accommodate eyes on the route.

SARA favoured the mid block parkette, as it was seen as more desirable to have a wider parkette. Additionally, rooftop gardens and terraces were not viewed as a public amenity by the group. The widened sidewalk on Bloor Street was identified as potentially advantageous, and the east plaza had a more favourable response, whereas the west plaza had the second lowest score. The articulation and transition was liked by SARA.

The SARA executive came to the conclusion that a combination of Scenarios 1 and 2 was seen as most desirable, aside from the height. They emphasized that you can have the most well designed character in the area, but if it doesn't fit, it will detract from the character of the neighborhood.

world19

world19 contacted their membership using email in order to generate some response to the proposed massing scenarios. Many of the comments the group received were previously shared by other presenters, and a representative speaking on behalf of world19 added that they found difficulty in accurately assessing the scenarios from a bird's eye view, as opposed to a ground-level view.

The gateway concept was considered by the group, and world19 felt that the Humber Odeon site was the more applicable site for the gateway. They feel that commercial activity and a vibrant storefront scenario are characteristic of Bloor West Village, and world19 found it difficult to imagine people shopping west of Jane. World19 wondered what types of storefronts and activities might invite people to cross Jane and utilize the streetscape.

Traffic was also a concern for the members of world19.

Questions and Clarifications

These presentations concluded the report backs from Working Group members. It was noted that a diversity of perspectives were presented – a clear consensus did not emerge with respect to a preferred scenario. A discussion followed.

Area Character

A member of the Bloor Jane Humber Residents Group was asked to clarify her position on the character of the area. It was clarified that the character of Bloor West Village is seen as very urban, while the character in Humber-Jane is residential in nature. An observer indicated that residents of the area relate to Bloor West Village, but they also relate strongly to the banks of the Humber River, the natural wildlife and river salmon, and the trees. It was noted that there needs to be a transition between the natural, residential, and commercial areas (moving west to east).

Transition

Antonio Gómez-Palacio added that all groups identified a sense of transition as being of value, and that where possible, the bulk of the mass and activity should be concentrated on the eastern most block of the properties.

Concern was raised again about the viability of retail in this area, given current volumes of traffic, and the speed with which vehicles proceed. On-street parking was identified as a potential asset that could serve to mitigate this issue, if combined with a widened sidewalk.

Traffic

SARA stated that the traffic issue is a significant existing condition, despite the fact that there are already traffic calming measures in place. Each community group identified traffic as a single focus area that demands resolution, as it is a significant issue. Councillor Saundercook emphasized the need to keep main arterials moving – slowing traffic will force drivers to seek other routes through the neighbourhoods.

Jennifer Keesmaat reaffirmed that traffic is a key outstanding issue, and confirmed that the Working Group process did not involve a technical analysis of transportation issues. This will be a next step for Tridel and it's consulting traffic engineers.

Potential At-Grade Uses

Jennifer Keesmaat sought to clarify a point made by the Working Group members, wherein they stated that a primary concern is that unlike Bloor West Village, the viability of the retail services is a concern. It was clarified that retail is desired by residents – the concern is commercial viability. She emphasized that Tridel would analyze this viability, and that their prospective tenants would do the same.

It was suggested that the west side of the properties should become more residential, and that commercial might not thrive adjacent and opposite to existing residential.

Antonio Gómez-Palacio noted that the concerns being voiced regarding commercial uses at grade were a clear departure from the feedback received from the Visual Preference Survey on Thursday, September 18th. One of the Working Group members confirmed this, and mentioned that initially, it was a great idea to see – but many of the Working Group members have had sober second thoughts

due to a concern about commercial viability.

Building Massing

There was some dialogue regarding the building massing scenarios. One Working Group member pointed out that the most westerly building requires specific articulation and stepping back from the adjacent residences and Bloor Street in order to transition appropriately. He raised concern about potential shadows. Jennifer Keesmaat responded, stating that due diligence and shadow studies would be part of Tridel's next steps, as they prepare an application for the site.

It was agreed that Scenario #4 was not liked by Working Group members, as they felt pushing the mass into a higher form was inappropriate. There was concern expressed regarding the overall massing on the site, and how that massing would be accommodated in a form that was acceptable.

Parks and Open Spaces

A Working Group member mentioned that Scenario 2 would improve the green space, making it more desirable. Jennifer Keesmaat pointed out that one of the most favored approaches was one that featured a midblock connection. Another Working Group member said that parkland will have to be added to what's there, in order to become useful –it's currently too small, irregular, and isn't properly used. Jennifer Keesmaat responded by demonstrating where the proposed scenarios opened up the pinch point that exist by adding more land to these connections.

One group of residents did not see a plaza on the west of the property as viable. It might appear to jut out; seeming out of place and creating a wide open space that would not be profitable for retailers. Meanwhile, the east plaza, although the proposed angle was questioned, creates a place for cafes, ice cream shops or an eating area, in keeping with the nature of Bloor West Village.

The Bloor West Village BIA supported the treatment of the sidewalk in Scenario #4.

Next Steps and Closing

In closing, Steve Upton indicated that the website (www.2500bloor.ca) would continue to function as a news feed, and that Tridel would now attempt to come up with solutions to a number of the problems outlined, using the principles provided by the process. He stressed that what was said at the meeting was in no way leading Tridel in any one direction, but that he hopes Tridel is able to formulate a development that incorporates some of the objectives.

Mr. Upton reiterated that the plans and this process had given Tridel insight. He thanked the Working Group Members for their collaborative effort, for staying engaged and plugged in to the process up until this point. He acknowledged the volunteer hours involved.

Jennifer Keesmaat noted that one of the goals of the process was to engage in a meaningful dialogue, by equipping all Working Group Members with the information needed to think through the constraints and opportunities of this site in a thoughtful, as opposed to reactionary, way. She acknowledged that the process was strengthened as a result of the conversations that took place, and now, very clearly, decisions need to be made.

Jennifer ended the meeting by saying that the process has been contingent on the cooperation of the Working Group members, not only to show up to every meeting, but the efforts put in between meetings. Thanks were expressed for the thoughtful responses received today.