

May 12, 2020

Attn. Office of the City Clerk

Re: SRPRS.20.058 – Directions Report for the Yonge and Bernard Key Development Area – City File Numbers: D11-17001 and D24-17001

I have read the report and believe that council should reject the proposed plan for a number of reasons. The main reason is that the proposed increases in height and density permissions are completely inconsistent with the goals and plans embodied in our Strategic Plan. These height and density permissions would have a detrimental impact upon the future vision and direction for not only this area, but for Richmond Hill as a whole.

The Official Plan recognizes the Yonge/Bernard KDA as being significantly smaller in scale than the Yonge/16th KDA, and the Richmond Hill Centre KDA at Yonge St. & Hwy 7. This proposal would be inconsistent with the vision laid out in the Official Plan and would completely disregard the input and hard work derived through many hours of consultation that eventually produced the originally adopted 2017 KDA plan for the Yonge/Bernard area.

While I may have my own thoughts about the densities of the 2017 KDA plan, I do respect that the extensive consultation process that culminated in the final version was a fair compromise for meeting the obligations set out for growth denoted in various municipal, regional, and provincial plans and acts. I also feel that the 2017 KDA plan meets and exceeds the requirements outlined in the subsequent changes announced by the provincial government in 2019.

What is concerning about this proposal being brought before council today (May 13, 2020), is that the current process for resident participation has become too restrictive (due, in part, to the COVID 19 restrictions), but also because the timing of this rushed proposal seems totally unnecessary. I'm of the opinion that the motion presented by Councillor West at the April 22, 2020 meeting would have left Richmond Hill in a better position to address or resolve appeals registered with LPAT.

Further, it is my understanding that an emergency order was issued that cancelled all hearings scheduled between March 16, 2020 and June 30, 2020. Although the July dates from the June 22, 2020 LPAT hearing may still be available to all parties at the moment, there is a strong likelihood that by mid-June LPAT will announce a further adjournment of hearing dates beyond the June 30, 2020 date.

I understand that Richmond Hill needs to ensure that they are positioned to address or resolve appeals at LPAT; however I feel that this report is going in the wrong direction and is fraught with a number of caveats which make the validity of the assessment results a concern. Of particular note:

- The proposed means for determining increased height has never been tried on an area-wide basis before;
- An analysis of the risks and opportunities for parking under public streets and parks through stratification has not yet been determined;
- Addressing transportation capacity constraints is predicated upon a number of operational and anticipated changes to actually take place. Such as:
 - The adoption of a proposed road network (which one council member has expressed opposition to) which staff has suggested “*represents the minimum that is required for new development to be accommodated*”;
 - Several transit projects have been identified that need to be completed, funded or approved to accommodate the proposed increased density; and
 - Substantial transit modal splits along identified regional corridors would need to be met and would require constant monitoring and analysis to support additional density.

The need to meet specific transit modal splits should be a major concern particularly when forecasting what public transit might be in a post pandemic environment. In all likelihood there will be a large number of commuters that will not return to public transit due to the close proximity to others. There will be others that don't return because they (or their employers) have realized benefits from working from home. A further hit to public transit will come from measures that will undoubtedly need to be implemented post pandemic, where (as a minimum) implementing a variety of measures for maintaining a clean and safe transit system (i.e. disinfectant supplies, additional staff to do the cleaning, etc.). Bottom line is that it is highly unlikely that the necessary transit modal splits to support any increased intensification will be met.

If, as I suspect, there is a shift away from public transit for the reasons I've identified above, then it is reasonable to suggest that the market demand for such high-rise accommodations would also suffer. One can easily foresee a number of “white elephants” in this KDA should this proposed intensification in development be permitted to proceed.

As I alluded to earlier, the 2017 KDA Plan is already well positioned to defend appeals before LPAT. Council should not adopt the proposed plan, but should endorse the 2017 KDA Plan for Planning Staff to use to defend at the upcoming LPAT hearings.

Thank you.

Scott Thompson
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