SMART CENTRES SOUTH HILL PROPOSAL

A Resident's Perspective

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DIVERSE & DIVERGING PRIORITIES FOR RICHMOND HILL'S GROWTH

RESIDENTS

- Family-oriented, warm & welcoming neighbourhoods
- Green, walkable streetscapes
- Good quality of life – manageable traffic, parks

CITY COUNCIL

- Accommodate population growth – 12K over 10 years [1]
- Satisfy transit investments by maximizing density
- "Building a new kind of urban"

DEVELOPERS

- Profitability – maximum density, minimum expense
- Time to profit – small units sell more quickly
- Private amenities to attract buyers

ONTARIO GOVERNMENT

- Accommodate GTA population growth – 2.5M over 27 years [2]
- Seniors (65+) growth doubling
- Increase density of GTA communities

Source: [1] Richmond Hill 2019 Socio-Economic Study, [2] Ontario Ministry of Finance Populaion Projections

RESIDENTS SUPPORT INTENSIFICATION BUT OPPOSE OVERINTENSIFICATION

- Approximately 315 residents have signed a petition objecting to the level of intensification proposed for South Hill (NE corner of Yonge/16th)
  - http://chng.it/zbcxvxRmX4

- Almost 635 residents signed a petition objecting to the level of intensification proposed for 9251 Yonge (SE corner of Yonge/16th)
  - https://www.change.org/p/richmond-hill-town-council-limit-height-of-yonge-16th-high-rise-buildings

WHY PROPOSAL FOR SOUTH HILL IS CONSIDERED OVER-INTENSIFICATION

	KDA	Smart Centre Proposal	% Change
Height (storeys)	20	45/42	+225 %
Density (people & jobs/hectare)	400-480	2040	+510 %
Floor space index	3.0	8.78	+293 %
# units	528	821	+55 %
Family units	5% (41)	0.7% (6)	-85 %
Parking / unit	1.08	0.65	-40 %

SOME GENERAL OBSERVATIONS ABOUT DEVELOPMENT IN RICHMOND HILL

- "Ragtag" approach to development; need a plan that incorporates not just housing and transit but shopping, schools, parks, entertainment etc. within the KDA – where are the neighbourhood restaurants that will host the over 10,000 new residents?

- With a projected population increase of 12,000 over the next 10 years, the proposed high rises in the Yonge/16th KDA alone, will more than satisfy that growth; given all the housing projects underway and planned, supply appears on a track to grossly exceed demand

- The development model seems to be geared toward young, single people and young couples who will be riding the subway to jobs in downtown Toronto

  - 60% of the population live in households of 3 or more people (mostly families)

  - Population is aging; retirees who want to downsize and remain in RH want a spacious condo with room to entertain their kids and grandkids and allow for sleepovers

  - Work environment is changing to a more "work from home" model

  - No meaningful jobs being created in RH to reduce the need to commute

ADDITIONALLY, THE COVID PANDEMIC TAUGHT US A FEW THINGS

- The greater the density, the greater the risk of infection
  - Infection rates greater in high density neighbourhoods
- Work from home is here to stay
  - According to Urbanation, apartment vacancy rates in Toronto hit an all time high in 4Q20 as residents moved out of the city
  - Houses in small communities outside the GTA (including cottage country) are in high demand as they offer both the indoor space to allow working from home and the outdoor space to practice physical distancing
- Natural outdoor space is invaluable for mental health
  - Studies show 20-30 minutes outdoors in nature improves health outcomes and has massive cost avoidance savings
  - Parks Prescription program rolled out in Ontario in February to allow doctors to prescribe that patients spend time in nature

SPECIFICALLY, REGARDING SOUTH HILL, THERE ARE MANY CONCERNS ABOUT THE PROPOSAL

- Non-compliance with the Richmond Hill Official Plan (OP)
  - The OP represents the desires of the community; by rejecting the parameters outlined in the OP, developers are basically saying "screw you" to the residents of RH and trying to dictate how and where we will live
- Excessive height and density
  - At 45 stories, South Hill condo will be taller than the RBC Centre (42 stories) and one story short of the TD North Tower (46 stories) in downtown Toronto; Toronto has a population of 2.7 million – more than 10x that of Richmond Hill
  - Hullmark building in North York has 45 stories and 684 units (20% fewer units than South Hill) and is the tallest building outside of downtown Toronto; North York has a population of almost 900,000 – almost 4x that of Richmond Hill
  - How can this height and density be justified when there is so much housing being built throughout RH?

MORE CONCERNS ABOUT THE SOUTH HILL PROPOSAL

- Increased traffic and public safety risk
  - According to the RH Socio-Economic Study, about 80% of residents drive to work; with 821 units, assuming 1 person per unit, that's an extra 650+ cars on the road during rush hour; and that's just this one building
  - If even a third of those cars were to travel east on 16th Ave during rush hour, which coincides with school drop offs, the children attending 16th Ave elementary school would be at greater risk as an extra two- to three- hundred cars speed along the road and worse try to outrun the light as kids are trying to cross
  - Pre-pandemic, during morning rush hour, if you are travelling southbound on Fern and want to turn left to go eastbound on 16th, you have no choice but to block the intersection until the light at Bayview changes and traffic starts to move; if you don't do that, you will never leave Fern as no one lets you in during rush hour; imagine what the traffic will be like with 9251 Yonge, South Hill and all the rest
- Lack of environmental and sustainability features to combat climate change
  - Plans do not indicate use of energy conservation or green strategies

YET MORE CONCERNS ABOUT THE SOUTH HILL PROPOSAL

- **Character of the community**
  - While high rises will undoubtedly become part of the landscape along Yonge, they don't have to be soulless, concrete structures like (A)
  - (A) seems to be the new paradigm – no street side landscaping with commercial units at street level; and, note that the windows of the retail units are all covered with signage to either help protect the privacy of the occupants inside or to advertise their services; this does not portray a warm, welcoming streetscape, rather it feels like a cold, impoverished area where windows are boarded up
  - (B) on the other hand, has a little green space and feels more welcoming and safe...and family friendly; an added benefit is that the trees and grass will help convert some of the carbon dioxide from the cars into oxygen
  - Where would you rather live...(A) or (B)? South Hill appears to be more like (A)

(A)   **(B)**

AND A FEW MORE CONCERNS ABOUT THE SOUTH HILL PROPOSAL

- Lack of public parks and green space
  - World Health Organization recommends minimum of 9 m^2 of accessible urban green space per person
  - With 821 units housing approximately 1,200 – 1,500 people, that requires 11,000-13,500 m^2 (1 hectare) of green space
  - While the design calls for provision of private green space as part of the amenities, given the whole site is only 0.8 hectare, it is inconceivable that that private space will be sufficient to accommodate all occupants
- Loss of / barriers to shopping venues
  - Developer is expecting to use the South Hill parking lot to accommodate overflow residential parking and visitor parking to the site; this will reduce the number of spots available for those shopping at the plaza; also, there will be significantly more traffic using the service road that leads to/from the plaza from 16th
  - No Frills, Dollarama, CIBC etc. do not appear as part of phase 1; will future phases include these stores?

A FEW THOUGHTS FOR CONSIDERATION AND ACTION

- Developers will always present the best case scenario for traffic, parking etc., but we need to deal with reality; so, why not go back and study the after effects of prior projects like 9201 Yonge and see whether their original projections were met and/or what kind of variance was experienced (pre-pandemic)
  - This real-life data can then be used to:
    - Validate or negate the findings of the RH Socio-Economic Study which underpins the planning process
    - Model the impacts of other projects, like South Hill, so that the developers' assumptions can be tested
- Given the City's goal to reduce its carbon footprint, what role can and should developers like Smart Centres play?
- With a projected population increase of 12,000 over 10 years, is all this over-intensification really needed?
- What will your legacy be? Will it be a city populated with skyscrapers giving off a cold, drab, impoverished vibe or one populated with high rises that help convey the sense of a warm, green, vibrant and welcoming community?

IN SUMMARY, THE APPLICATION TO AMEND THE OP AND ZONING TO FACILITATE THE DEVELOPER'S PROPOSAL SHOULD BE STRUCK DOWN

- Granting the application would set a dangerous precedent and hand control of the City's vision and future, to developers, whose only interest is growing their profits as quickly as possible

- Intensification is needed but should be done in a family friendly way that is part of a grand plan encompassing housing, transit, parks, shopping, banking, personal services and entertainment – all key elements of life

- Skyscrapers that are 45 and 42 stories high are too high and are a blight to our landscape; let's stick with the parameters set out in the Official Plan that was agreed to by Council and more importantly, was accepted by residents

- Character matters – both in people and in communities; Richmond Hill deserves more than trying to become a soulless imitation of downtown Toronto; we are a community rich in history, comprised of green, leafy neighbourhoods, built by families for families, and embrace diversity and growth

- Residents need Council to stand up for our wishes even if it's at the detriment of developers; Councillors are elected to represent their constituents and should uphold their promise to serve, by being the voice of the people