

Delegation to City of Richmond Re: Proposed Official Plan Amendments 18.5- 18.8

First, thank you to council and staff of providing a number of opportunities to provide comments in the planning cycle for these amendments. I think it is fair to say that much of the material to date is at the conceptual level. However, I would like to elaborate on a few ideas that I do not see addressed as yet. My hope is that these ideas will find a way into the planning material as the City closes in on the developer cycle of inevitable exemption requests and provincially driven edicts on what the physical build needs to be. My comments are in no particular order in terms of where they fit into the planning cycle. I will leave that to the planning staff and council to slot in.

1. It would behoove the city to introduce and negotiate with the developers to provide “award winning” proposals that specifically address healthy neighbourhoods, vibrant active street scape environments, climate change responsive buildings whether in dealing with reuse of grey water, more dedicated green space on site, or energy use etc. In other words, a paradigm shift from what has gone on along the Yonge Street corridor to date.

It would be good to see development proposals appear before council that have won recognized relevant awards or that can be submitted to independent bodies in the expectation of receiving an award. Many of the following items should be considered as characteristics of award winning proposals. I would be happy to see a developer ask for ten additional floors beyond the official plan if they seriously incorporated the following ideas.

2. There needs to be mixed use. This is measured by the activities on the sidewalks of these various planning zones. **Street activity needs to continue throughout the day, evening and night.** This means the street is NOT only a corridor for the passerby. The buildings should not turn their back on the street. This is what has happened so far on Yonge St. and adjacent streets where condos have gone in. The streetscapes are barren. Each block needs activity anchors, dance studios/theatres/cultural venues/community-based organizations, that support cafes, specialty stores, low rent businesses, high rent businesses, grocery stores, deli's and others. The street scapes need benches tables (ping pong, chess), trees (more on trees later). This of course means that the sidewalks and greenery on the street level are wide enough to accommodate all this activity. It cannot be stressed enough that cultural/entertainment centres must be part of the mixed use. Mixed use should not be limited to things that close by 6pm. Also cultural/entertainment centres also provide business for restaurants etc.
3. The streets themselves need to be short, offering the pedestrian opportunities follow different paths, at the same time creating more places for commerce on street corners and for encountering fellow neighbours. In all of the plan amendments there is ample opportunity to create shorter and more streets, or even better, some pedestrian only streets. Long blocks create a sense of isolation, not community.

4. This next idea is a challenge, but the age of the buildings needs to vary, all new, homogenous architecture, creates uniform facades that typically are not open to the street. It is like the street plays only one note. This is especially true of residential condominiums which provide no interaction with the street, unless various other commercial activities are on the main floors that invite neighbours to be part of what can be referred to the 'ballet of the street'.
5. A word about trees. The City should require that any development plans submitted to council should identify the tree species that will be planted on a site and the rational why. This simple requirement will have knock on effects in terms of the thought and design effort that developers need to put into what the street scape will look like and how it will function as part of a neighbourhood.
6. A word about transit. Each of the plan amendments 18.5-8 seem to have an extensive vocabulary around public transit. Yet the vocabulary around pedestrian and cycling traffic (cycling as a mode of transportation-not recreation) seems sparse. Vibrant communities are built on pedestrian usability and attraction. Subway and above ground transit is a method to remove residents from each of these planned developments for periods of a time. A shift in thinking needs to take place here. Optimally a large minority of people should work in their neighbourhoods.
7. A word about density. There is a certain density needed to create neighbourhood, hence high rises. However, a focus on building height should be secondary to a focus on the street level experience that is being created. Previous discussions I have had the privilege to attend focused on fsa's etc. not what the neighbourhood experience a building or set of buildings bring to a neighbourhood. This needs to change.
8. A word about parks. A person in any of the plan amendment areas should be no more than a ten minute walk from a park, fountain with benches, play area for the kids.
9. A word about public land. In the long forgotten past developers had to turn over a portion of their development site to public/community space. This was rescinded to allow developers to pay cash in lieu of space. In all these development areas award worthy designs would resort back to developers giving up land for public/community use.

Thank you again to the staff and council for continuing to work at building community and neighbourhoods in Richmond Hill.