



Village Core Residents Association
Richmond Hill, ON
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VIA EMAIL TO: kelvin.kwan@richmondhill.ca

Mr. Kelvin Kwan
Commissioner of Planning
City of Richmond Hill
225 East Beaver Creek
Richmond Hill, ON L4B 3P4

Dear Mr. Kwan,

This letter is being written on behalf of the Village Core Residents Association, which represents many area residents who are concerned with the high-rise development proposed by the Acorn Development Corporation and their partners (“Acorn”) at the north-west corner of Arnold Crescent and Major Mackenzie Drive West in Richmond Hill. The current development application (D01-20014 and D02-20028) proposes 790 residential units in four high-rise towers ranging from 10 to 19 storeys in height, with 2-3 levels of parking below grade. The same developer was previously proposing a townhome development on these lands (D02-18020 and D03-18009). In December of 2020, Acorn withdrew that application and submitted a revised plan, which represents a significant increase in height and density to that proposed in the original application, as well as a more expansive underground parking lot.

We have reviewed the Urban Design Brief prepared by Bousfields Inc. for Acorn and we have some serious concerns with many of the facts, opinions and conclusions presented within the report.

The following are a list of discrepancies in the brief that need clarification.

- (a) In section 4.1 the brief states that “The Subject Site encompasses an area of 26,851 square metres (2.68 hectares) with approximately 75.0 metres of frontage along Major Mackenzie Drive West, and approximately 142.4 metres of frontage along Arnold Crescent.”

These dimensions do not appear correct since the area based on the dimensions stated would mean the site is only 10,680 square metres vs the 26,851 square metres stated.

(b) In 5.2 SWOT Analysis – Opportunities:

They erroneously reference MTSA 43 when they may have meant MTSA 40.

(c) In section 4.2.2 Linkages to Open Spaces they state that there are connections between Don Head Park and the subject site.

There is no such linkage on subject site.

(d) In the section 4.2.3 Lot Fabric the brief states “The existing low-density residential neighbourhood to the east and north of the Subject Site is comprised of lots that are largely rectilinear that are relatively narrow and compact, laid out in a generally uniform pattern, characteristic of residential subdivision developments.”

In fact, the existing lots on Arnold Crescent are generally wide- not compact and uniform as claimed. They are definitely not characteristic of residential subdivision developments.

(e) In section 4.2.7 Views and Vistas to and from the Site the D “View Looking North on Arnold Crescent (Google Image)”

This view is incorrect, it is a view looking east on Major Mackenzie Drive West.

These discrepancies raise to question some of the other comments and conclusions contained in the brief.

Regardless, the Village Core Neighbourhood Design Guidelines (VCNDG) represent the most relevant set of development guidelines available for assessment of this proposed development. We acknowledge that there are additional design guidelines in the Richmond Hill Urban Design Guidelines (RHUDG) that should also be considered when reviewing the suitability of the proposed development.

VCNDG states “Compatible development means development that may not necessarily be the same or similar to the existing buildings in the vicinity, but, nonetheless, enhances an established community and co-exists with existing development without causing any undue adverse impact on surrounding properties.”

The Urban Design Brief prepared by Bousfields Inc., acknowledges the importance of the VCNDG and assesses the proposed development against these guidelines in 5.3.7. However, their assessment fails to properly evaluate the proposed development against many of the key guidelines. The one guideline (#35 on compatible building height) which is admittedly not met is, in fact, the most important and the degree to which it doesn’t align with the guideline is enormous. The explanations presented as justification for this are weak.

VCNDG states that there is a very fine balance between increasing density and maintaining the character of existing built and landscaped forms. The proposed ultra urban metropolis-like Acorn development would produce a stark contrast to the existing mature, heritage estate single detached house form present in the neighbourhood.

Our view is that the mass, height, and character of the proposed development is not at all compatible with the character of the existing neighbourhood. The development will severely impact adjacent

residents and lead to loss of privacy and sunlight. The landscape plan treatment of the proposed development disrespects the lush and green landscape character of the neighbourhood.

We have completed our own review and provided our comments on **Section 5.3.7 Village Core Neighbourhood Design Guidelines Checklist** and have also reviewed and provided comments on Section **2.2 Design Principles**. These reviews follow together with a series of questions for the City.

5.3.7 Village Core Neighbourhood Design Guidelines Checklist

The Urban Design Brief uses the VCNDG Checklist to assess whether, or not, the proposed Acorn development is suitable for the village core. We have reviewed their report and have the following comments:

Guideline 35. Compatible building height will vary depending on the specific conditions of the buildings in the immediate context of the site of the apartment building. Height should not overwhelm adjacent residences and should generally be in the range of 4-6 stories.

DOES NOT MEET

The Urban Design Brief prepared by Bousfields Inc agrees that this guideline is not met.

They attempt to justify the 10-19 storey towers by presenting weak arguments including why the 4 storey base buildings meet the VCNDG guideline and on how the guideline shouldn't apply given the proximity to arterial roads and transit.

Guideline 36. Buildings should be oriented to face the street with setbacks that are compatible with the immediate neighbours.

DOES NOT MEET

VCNDG planning guidelines envision setbacks for the proposed buildings that are comparable to those of the adjacent homes. The setbacks on properties on the east side of Arnold facing this development range from 7m to 23m. The proposed development has setbacks that are far less.

Guideline 39. Building should not cover more than 35% of the lot area, landscaped open space should comprise 35% of the lot area

DOES NOT MEET

The lot coverage will be more than 35% once non-developable land is taken into consideration.

Guideline 40. Building mass should be compatible with buildings in the immediate vicinity of the development.

DOES NOT MEET

The development will severely impact the adjacent residents due to loss of privacy and sunlight. Along with the impacts to homes on Arnold Crescent and Guinevere Court, the development plan does not consider impacts on Alexander Mackenzie High School or any impacts on future development of the site which forms a part of the existing Trench St LDA. The 45-degree angular plane is completely ignored on

the west side of the site. There will be significant loss of privacy on the HS and any future development on the south-east portion of the HS property.

Guideline 41. The front yard setback should be landscaped.

DOES NOT MEET

VCNDG planning guidelines envision setbacks for the proposed buildings that are comparable to those of the adjacent homes. The setbacks on properties on the east side of Arnold facing this development range from 7m to 23m. The proposed development has setbacks that are far less. The sparse landscaping proposed along the narrow setback after removal of all existing mature trees along the boulevard results in an inadequately landscaped front yard.

Guideline 42. Road improvements and maintenance of utilities should be completed in a manner that preserves and enhances the heritage character of the Village Core neighbourhood.

DOES NOT MEET

The proposed Acorn development proposes concrete sidewalks which are in stark contrast to the existing interlocking walkway on the opposite side of Arnold Crescent. The proposed Acorn development proposes to replace the existing informal road edges which are characteristic of this heritage Village Core neighbourhood with full urban curbs, boulevard and concrete sidewalks.

Guideline 43. The pavement width should be kept as narrow as possible to accommodate two travel lanes and on street parking on at least one side. If curbs are required, a low rolled curb should be used rather than a full urban curb.

DOES NOT MEET

Arnold Crescent isn't wide enough to allow on street parking and would need to be widened to allow for any street parking for residents or guests.

Guideline 45. Existing informal road edges such as grassed verges and road side drainage swales add character to the Village Core neighbourhood and should be preserved.

DOES NOT MEET

The proposed Acorn development proposes to replace the existing informal road edges which are characteristic of this Village Core neighbourhood with full urban curbs, boulevard, and concrete sidewalks.

Guideline 46. Protect the existing street trees, replace the dead ones and plant trees to complete the existing gaps.

DOES NOT MEET

The proposed Acorn development will force the removal of a large number of very mature trees both along the Arnold Crescent and Major Mackenzie Drive West.

2.2 Design Principles

In addition to the VCNDG Checklist, Section 2.2 of the Urban Design Brief presents a series of principles that it claims align with Richmond Hill's policies and guidelines. Their assessment presents weak, and often misleading, comments on the alignment with Richmond Hill policies and guidelines. The principles are stated below along with our comments:

(1) Enhance the Existing Character of the Site

The proposed Acorn development doesn't maintain the character, is not compatible and does not respect the surrounding context as claimed. VCNDG specifies that new development should be compatible with the scale and character of existing homes. The urban modern/ contemporary architectural design of both the base and high-rise buildings present a dramatically different appearance to the existing traditional and heritage architectural residences.

The transitions in height, step-backs and articulation on the proposed buildings are grossly inadequate given the existing 1-2 storey homes in the existing residential neighborhood.

VCNDG envisions up to a maximum of 3 storey homes vs even the proposed 4 storey base building elements not to mention the 10 to 19 storey towers that form part of the proposed development.

The 45-degree angular view plane referenced in the document may be suitable for development in intensification areas along Yonge Street but a 30-degree angular plane may be more suitable for this VCN which is far from those intensification areas. This 30-degree angular plane is referenced in the RHUDG for Church St and should be considered for this area as well.

(2) Provide a Transit-Supportive Built Form

Although the site sits on Major Mackenzie Drive West, it is not situated in a prime location to access rapid transit. The site is over 600m from MTSA 40 on the Yonge Street BRT.

The high parking ratio of this development proposal is not suggestive of transit-supporting built form. As an example, the City of Toronto often approves parking of only 0.15 spots per unit, or even less (no parking at all) for Transit-Supportive build forms.

(3) Create a Positive Pedestrian Experience at Ground Level

The proposed development presents a street wall height that is completely out of context with the surrounding area, and stands in stark contrast to the existing single family home neighbourhood.

The development doesn't include sufficient public pedestrian walkways or parkland.

It also doesn't include any commercial uses along Major Mackenzie Drive West which might include restaurants, cafes with patios, a convenience store, personal service retailers other establishments which would animate the public realm. The closest commercial area with any of these is on Yonge Street.

Combined, these factors lead to a development which doesn't foster a positive pedestrian experience at grade.

(4) Maintain Compatibility and Respect the Surrounding Context

Our view is that the proposed Acorn development is dramatically different than the existing residential single family homes in the immediate area. The development would not integrate at all with the existing adjacent homes and would severely negatively impact the existing community.

VCNDG outlines the potential for apartments with 4 up to a maximum of 6 stories. The proposed development proposes towers far in excess of this ranging from 10 up to 19 stories.

Even the adjacent Trench Street Local Development Area plans envisions only a maximum of up to 8 stories, and then only adjacent to Major Mackenzie Drive West.

The four-storey street wall height of the development's base buildings doesn't respond to the surrounding context. It does not present an appropriate relationship with existing adjacent 1 and 2 storey low-rise dwellings on Arnold Crescent.

The proposed four storey base buildings present an ultra modern urban architecture fortress-like complex presenting a sharp contrast to the pitched and varied rooflines present in the existing single family homes.

It is our view that the 45-degree angular view plane referenced in the document may be suitable for development in intensification areas along Yonge Street, but a 30-degree angular plane may be more suitable for this Village Core Neighbourhood which is far removed from that intensification area. This 30-degree angular plane is referenced in the RHUDG for Church St and should be considered for this area as well.

Questions

Question #1: Does the City support a development with a density which is far in excess of the 50 units per hectare permitted for the existing neighbourhood designation?

The density of the proposed development is far more than the density allowable based on current plans and zoning. For the existing neighbourhood designation, a maximum of 50 housing units per hectare is allowed. The site is 2.68 hectares but non-developable land for the watercourse running through the property needs to be excluded. This non-developable land is estimated at approximately 20% reducing the site to about 2.26 hectares and a maximum of 107 units.

The proposed development is seeking approval for 790 housing units at an FSI of 2.35. This requested FSI does not account for the need to exclude non developable land due the watercourse. As stated, we estimate this reduces the developable land by 20% driving the requested FSI up to 2.94, almost double the allowable limit for the adjacent Trench Street Local Development Area.

Question #2: Is it a priority for the City to protect the character of the village core? Will the design guidelines contained in the Village Core Neighbourhood Design Guidelines (VCNDG) be used by the city to evaluate the suitability of the proposed development?

Question #3: Does the city support the need for this development to provide for public spaces including a park, pedestrian path along the watercourse and interconnecting to the City's woodlot and Don Head Park?

Question #4: Does the City support expansion of the Trench Street LDA to include the Acorn site? If so, does the City support drastically changing the intended uses and benefits of the LDA to the community?

First, the proposed development isn't currently part of the proposed Trench Street Local Development Area. The boundaries of this LDA include the Mackenzie Richmond Hill Hospital and Alexander Mackenzie High School on the northside of Major Mackenzie Drive West and the York-Med Medical Centre on the southside of Major Mackenzie Drive. Acorn is seeking to change the LDA boundaries to include the entire area on the north-east side of Major Mackenzie Drive West from Alexander Mackenzie High School thru to the intersection of Arnold Crescent and Major Mackenzie Drive West.

Secondly, the Trench Street LDA is defined as "a mixed-use employment node focused around community uses with particular emphasis on health-related services associated with the Mackenzie Richmond Hill Hospital". Acorn is proposing to build purely residential buildings without any employment or community uses.

Finally, the LDA provides for a minimum building height of three storeys and a maximum building height of eight storeys, with the tallest buildings being directed to the Major Mackenzie Drive West frontage. These taller buildings fronting on Major Mackenzie Drive West are required to provide commercial, retail, office or community uses at grade. Acorn's development proposal includes four buildings that are from 10 of up to 19 stories, far exceeding the maximum 8 storey height allowed with two of the four buildings quite distant from Major Mackenzie Drive West and deep into the residential neighbourhood.

Acorn is not only seeking to extend the boundaries of the existing Trench Street Local Development area to include the entire proposed development, but they are also proposing to drastically change the intended uses and benefits of the LDA to the community.

Question #5: Does the city support expansion of MTSA 40 to include this site? If so, can you explain why the City's position has changed?

Acorn suggests that the proposed development should be considered part of an expanded Major Transit Station Area (MTSA 40) area thus justifying the increased densification since it is within 800m of the Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) station on Yonge Street south of Major Mackenzie.

In fact, the proposed development is not part of the approved MTSA 40. On the north-side of Major Mackenzie Drive West it is approximately 200m away from the westerly boundary of the MTSA. There is an existing residential community on this 200m stretch of land, so the proposed development is far removed and non-contiguous to the approved MTSA 40.

Acorn's previous attempts to have the parcel of land included in the MTSA during the public consultations by York Region were denied by both the Region and the City of Richmond Hill.

In the MTSA Endorsement Report, which was endorsed by York Region council in September 2020, it states:

"Regional and local planning staff are in agreement that the property will not be included in the Major Mackenzie Drive BRT Station as it is located in the City's Neighbourhood designation and is outside of the City of Richmond Hill's Downtown Local Centre and Local Mixed-Use Corridor. The subject property is fairly disconnected from the proposed MTSA boundary."

Question #6 What is the City's view on further intensification along Major Mackenzie Drive given the regional plans for a future BRT?

There are regional plans for a future BRT along Major Mackenzie Drive. We understand that while Major Mackenzie Drive may be an identified transit corridor, and that some level of intensification along this corridor may be desirable, it is not designated for development of more than four storeys. Across York Region there are many areas adjacent to Major Mackenzie Drive that are not and should not be intensely developed, including the subject site which directly abuts an established neighbourhood of single-family homes.

Thank you very much for your consideration. We would welcome the opportunity to discuss our questions and concerns with you further, at your convenience.

Warm regards,

Tony Faccia

Village Core Residents Association

CC: Village Core Residents Association

Leigh Ann Penner, Senior Planner

David West, Councillor Ward 4