

Appendix G

Summary of Consultation

A consultation process was undertaken as part of this study with a variety of stakeholders representing the City, community, development industry, and public.

Public Consultation

Public consultation was undertaken to gather feedback on the preliminary recommendations from this study. These consultation sessions included four Open Houses (one per Community Planning District) and a focus group with Local Advisory Committee (LAC) members from completed Avenue Studies.

City Consultation

Consultation with various City divisions and departments was undertaken throughout the course of the Avenues and Mid-Rise Buildings Study, beginning in the fall of 2008. The format of the consultation included workshops, presentations and question and answer sessions.

The consultant team met with the following groups:

- Mid-Rise Core Team
- Mid-Rise Interdivisional Team
- Planning Reference Group

Development Community Consultation

A series of stakeholder interviews were conducted with various members of the development community early in this study. The interviews were useful in identifying the barriers to developing mid-rise buildings from both a financial and an approvals process perspective. The following provides a summary of comments and suggestions provided by developers who have experience with the development of mid-rise buildings.

Summary of Feedback

Difficulty with Mid-Rise Development

- The current planning rationale for height allowance is not working at the City. It seems that the most attractive and financially feasible options for developers in the city are either tall buildings or low-rise developments.
- Mid-rise buildings are expensive to build because the fixed costs are generally the same as high-rise, but are spread across significantly fewer units.
- For mid-rise buildings with smaller floor-plates, Ontario Building Code requirements for egress decrease the available area for units even further.

Zoning & Development Process

- Many of the stakeholders that were interviewed spoke about the City of Toronto's zoning by-laws. Current zoning causes a lot of confusion throughout the development process for developers, particularly those who have less experience with development in Toronto.
- The development approval process significantly increases the "turnaround" time for development applications.
- Uncertainty in the rezoning process causes landowners to place an unreasonably high value on their lands, making consolidation difficult.

As-of-Right that reflects the Official Plan

- As-of-right zoning for mid-rise buildings on the Avenues is generally seen as a positive advancement towards removing barriers to mid-rise development under the City's processes.
- The development community recognizes that this new zoning regime will provide an incentive to develop mid-rise buildings on the Avenues.

Expedited Process & Dedicated Mid-Rise City Teams

- The City needs to dedicate resources to the planning process for mid-rise buildings. The first thing to address is the lengthy rezoning and Site Plan approval process. This process can take up to 18 months which is generally just as long as the process for a tall building.
- A dedicated Mid-Rise Interdivisional Team that is familiar with the challenges developers face when developing mid-rise projects could help identify ways in which to shorten the process.
- The Design Review Panel could also benefit the process, but only if it helped to shorten the approvals process.

Amenity Requirements

- There was a general consensus that the outdoor amenity requirements for residential uses on the Avenues could be allocated to additional public realm improvements as the Avenues themselves are the public amenities.
- The required amenity space for small mid-rise developments is an obstacle for a building with few units. It reduces the leasable floor space that is better suited to public uses such as retail. There should be some flexibility built into these requirements.

Parking

- Parking constraints need to be holistically examined. The City should be able to lower the parking and visitor requirements for new development if developers can justify that they can meet their parking needs in creative ways (e.g. close to subway or LRT stations, auto share opportunities or using surplus parking in existing developments).

Servicing and Loading

- The City's standards are often difficult to achieve. While the City has shown a willingness to review alternatives, this involves a lengthy negotiation process involving multiple City departments.
- The compliance alternatives developed through this study should be available to developers and either pre-approved or quickly approved where the City's standards cannot be achieved.
- Better interdivisional coordination is necessary within the City to expedite the review and approval for constrained Avenue sites.

Technical Requirements

- Construction fees for water and hydro areas are not adjusted for building size or eventual load on the services.
- Understandably, street connection costs are very high because of Toronto's aging infrastructure, but these fees should be adjusted to reflect the development intensity.

Certainty in the Process

- Overall, one of the most important factors that will persuade developers to consider mid-rise buildings is 'certainty' in the development process with the City, which may be achieved through mid-rise zoning.
- Decisions made by councillors, Committee of Adjustment and the Ontario Municipal Board are beyond the scope of staff control.
- If the development densities, costs and timeframes were clear at the beginning of the process, developers could make informed decisions about the feasibility of a project.