



the urban league of London

association of community groups

March 16, 2012

City Clerk's Office,
Room 308, 300 Dufferin Avenue,
P.O. Box 5035, London, ON N6A 4L9

TO: The Mayor and the Members of City Council

RE: Application by 1705820 Ontario Limited (York Developments – Mr. Ali Soufan)
2118 Richmond Street, London (cnr. Richmond St and Sunningdale Rd)
Meeting of the Council of the Corporation of the City of London, March 20, 2012

None of you sitting around the horseshoe this evening is a stranger to approaches by various interest groups lobbying for their particular preferences in terms of the public policy you are called on to make at every meeting of the council. The Urban League of London often does this, as do a myriad of other citizens and groups, and we make no apologies for doing so. In some limited sense, this is how council does its work. You receive the best advice of yours staff on matters before you, listen to the various viewpoints at the table and from the citizens that you are elected to serve, weigh the evidence and, at the end of the day, make the best-informed decision that you can.

Engaged citizens and interest groups recognize that they will be successful in modifying public policy on some matters and unsuccessful on others. Progress at the municipal level is as it should be: incremental. Rarely can legitimate arguments be made that “the sky is falling” when a decision is reached on a file that is contrary to the particular position of a citizen or interest group.

This is one of those rare occasions. You have before you this evening a recommendation from the Planning and Environment Committee, dealing with a proposed development at 2118 Richmond Street, which has the potential to strike a fatal blow at the notion of real citizen engagement in the city.

There are sound planning reasons for rejecting the application made by the proponent; reasons that have been stated clearly and concisely by your staff in their reports to you on the matter, by the residents in the neighbourhoods in close proximity to this proposed development, by other developers working in the area, and by the Ontario Municipal Board in previous comments on this matter. This isn't a matter of a minor change to a secondary parcel in this particular Area Plan – the corner of Sunningdale Road and Richmond Street is the premier site in the area, the public face, so to speak, of this rapidly-developing area of the city.

The Urban League of London views the recommendation before you this evening to be nothing less than a full frontal assault on the practice and integrity of *community planning* in the city of London; a practice that has been evolving over the past decade to include citizens in the planning processes and decisions made by councils on their behalf; one of the “bright spots” in the attempts by this council, and previous ones, to make urban planning and policy transparent, thoughtful and responsive to the interest of citizens in those places where they live and work.

The designation of the subject property as “Medium Density” by council was the direct result of years of work and negotiation and compromise by city staff and councillors, local residents, concerned citizens and the development industry itself, resulting in the Uplands North Area Plan. It was adopted by council and woven into the City of London Official Plan. The medium density designation was not challenged by the surrounding neighbourhoods or the development industry at the time. In the history of community planning in London, this is a story of real community engagement that ought to be celebrated and affirmed, not undermined by the *ad hoc* decisions of politicians determined to re-make the urban fabric of the city according to their personal whims; planning *on the fly* as it has been rightly characterized.

As you consider the recommendation of the Planning and Environment Committee to arbitrarily change the land use designation at 2118 Richmond Street, contrary to the best advice offered it not only by its professional planning staff but also, and perhaps more importantly, by the citizens and neighbours who spent so much of their time and energy in consultations with the city and with the development industry, over the course of several years, to put into place a widely-accepted Area Plan to be used to guide development in the area, please also consider the words of the OMB adjudicator who heard the original challenge in 2009:

“The existing land use designations at the intersection of Richmond Street and Sunningdale Road are the result of years of involvement by many individuals. **I am not prepared to undo that which has been achieved by extensive public involvement**, thoughtful municipal planning and by prudent decision making on the part of municipally elected officials. **To do otherwise would be to effectively subvert a planning process**, which has transpired over a considerable period of time. **In my view, Council’s decision in this matter was correct...**” [emphasis added]

Citizen and neighbourhood groups across the city are currently involved in a significant number of area planning processes underway within the city. These exercises are being conducted with thoughtfulness, transparency and a commitment to the *practice of community planning* as it attempts to fully engage all stakeholders in the search for the best and most authentic urban forms of the neighbourhoods in which they live.

Make no mistake, the message you will send to the citizens of London by accepting this absurd recommendation to change the land use designation at 2118 Richmond Street from medium density to any other designation will be heard loud and clear by citizens throughout the city, and it will have a chilling effect on citizen engagement and, thus, participation. Citizens will quickly identify this as a matter of patronage, not participation or proper public policy.

The resulting message will be clear: “Public participation is a charade, a fool’s game, an exercise in futility, for we do not really respect your right to participate in planning your own neighbourhoods. We know better than you what is good for you!”

Please, say NO to this recommendation. Uphold the integrity of the practice and processes of community planning in this city. Respect your citizens.

Retain the medium density at 2118 Richmond Street.

With best regards,

Greg Thompson,
President of the League.

Submission to the Council of the City of London

Application by 1705820 Ontario Limited to change the medium density designation at 2118 Richmond Street, as recommended by the Planning and Environment Committee