

ZBA Planning Rationale Report

221-225 Queens Avenue – ZBA Planning Rationale Report

Submitted by Sifton Properties Limited

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

This Planning Rationale Report is submitted by Sifton Properties for a proposed extension of a Temporary Zone application for property located on the south side of Queens Avenue, between Clarence Street and Wellington Street in downtown London. The property is legally described as Part Lots 4 & 5, S/S, Queens West, RP33R8646 Parts 1 & 4 in the City of London and is approximately 0.25 hectares in size (0.62 acres). Its municipal address is 221 Queens Avenue. Street frontage for the site is 56.9 metres.

The proposed ZBA would permit continuation of use of the site as a commercial parking lot, in addition to all other uses currently permitted. Access to the site is from Queens Avenue.

The key contacts for this application are Maureen Zunti (519-434-1000, ext. 238) or Phil Masschelein (519-434-1000, ext. 210) of Sifton Properties Limited.

2.0 SUMMARY OF PROPOSAL

The property is currently designated as Downtown Area on Schedule A of the Official Plan. Adjacent land use designations on all sides are also Downtown Area. No amendments to the Official Plan are proposed. It is designated as Downtown in The London Plan, which is not yet in full force and effect.

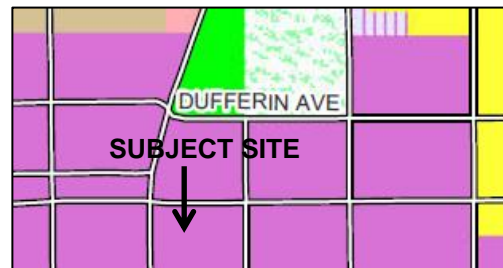


Figure 1 – Existing Official Plan Designation

The property is currently zoned Downtown Area (h-3*DA2*D350/T-69). This zone permits a very broad range of uses, including retail, office, arts, cultural and entertainment uses, restaurants, apartments, schools, hotels and commercial parking structures. The holding provision requires a wind impact assessment for any building over 15 metres in height.

The T-69 zone for the property permits a temporary surface commercial parking lot on the site which expires on April 15, 2017. The site has been used as a surface parking area for nearly 20 years. Prior to this, the site housed a number of smaller buildings believed to be used for commercial and office purposes prior to their demolition.

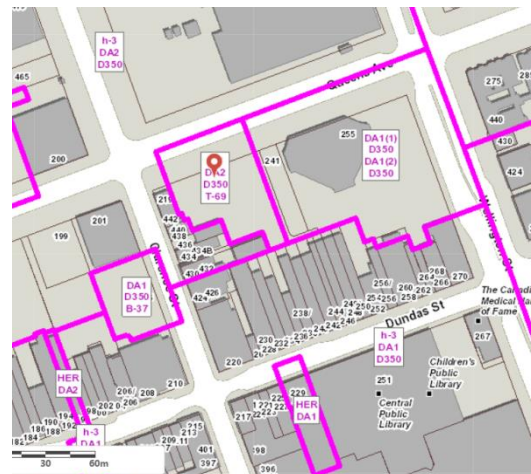


Figure 2 – Existing Zoning

3.0 PLANNING RATIONALE

The existing site is flat, paved and has been used as a commercial surface parking lot for approximately 20 years. It contains

65 regular parking spaces plus 2 handicapped parking spaces. All parking spaces are leased on a monthly parking basis to employees and tenants of surrounding office and commercial premises. There is no daily parking. Following is an aerial view of the subject site.



Figure 3 - Surrounding Context

Adjacent land uses are as follows:

- North – surface parking lot and London Life building
- East – surface parking area and One London Place office tower
- South – variety of office, retail and restaurant uses with some residential above (fronting onto Dundas Street)
- West – variety of office, retail and restaurant uses with some residential above (fronting onto Clarence Street)

The site is fully paved and contains landscaped screening and wrought iron fencing along the full frontage of Queens Avenue with the exception of the access lanes into the parking lot.

Following are a number of photos from the site and adjacent perimeter.



View of site from NW corner of Queens/Clarence



View of site from SW corner of Queens/Clarence



View of access to parking area from Queens



View of access to parking area from Queens



View of access & west side of parking lot from Queens



View of northern boundary of site



Continuation of view of northern boundary of site



Continuation of view of northern boundary of site



View of full northern boundary of site from east limit



View of sidewalk connection from Queens Ave



Interior view of parking lot facing south



Interior view of parking lot facing northwest

3.1 Provincial Policy Statement

The proposed zoning by-law amendment conforms to the Provincial Policy Statement in the following ways:

- Section 1.1.1 – The proposed ZBA promotes compact development by providing parking for downtown offices and retail, enabling it to remain in the core.
- Section 1.1.3 – The lands are within a designated settlement area.
- Section 1.3 – The proposed ZBA promotes economic development by providing necessary parking for employment lands within the downtown core.
- Section 1.6 – Municipal infrastructure is already in place to the subject site.
- Section 1.7 – The proposed ZBA supports long-term economic prosperity by helping to maintain the viability of downtown office and retail.

3.2 Official Plan Policies

Section 4.1.6.viii of the City of London Official Plan contains policies pertaining to commercial parking lots and structures in the Downtown Area, as follows:

“Commercial parking structures are a permitted use in the Downtown and are encouraged to locate in peripheral areas of the Downtown. The design of these structures along the street edge should be addressed through consideration of the Downtown Design Guidelines specifically requiring enhanced landscaping and consideration of pedestrian connections.

The long term intent of the Plan is to improve the aesthetics of existing surface parking lots and to discourage new surface parking lots in the Downtown, especially where they involve the removal of buildings.”

The proposed extension of the temporary zone complies with the Official Plan in the following ways:

- No change is proposed to the range of permitted uses;
- The parking lot already contains enhanced landscaping by way of a grass boulevard, mature coniferous and deciduous trees, shrubbery screening and a wrought iron fence;
- The parking lot is already in existence and does not involve the removal of any buildings.

3.3 The London Plan

The London Plan contains the following policy pertaining to temporary parking lots:

“5. Where surface commercial parking lots have previously been established through temporary zoning and have been in place for an extended period of time, further extensions of such temporary uses should be discouraged where an adequate supply of parking exists in the vicinity of the subject lot.” No criteria are included to assess what constitutes an “adequate supply”. However, to our knowledge, much of the parking in the immediate area is only available to tenants of specific buildings (e.g. – One London Place, London Life, etc.).

We recognize that the City wishes to discourage the continuation of surface parking lots in London’s core. However, these parking spaces are necessary for the economic viability of downtown, to attract and retain tenants in the various office buildings in the core. Furthermore, redevelopment of the property for other uses such as commercial or residential high-rise is somewhat constrained by both the small size and irregular shape of the lot which would make it challenging to develop when considering setback, access, parking and other zoning and site plan requirements.

3.4 Downtown Master Plan

London’s City Council adopted the London’s Downtown Plan, “Our Move Forward” on April 14, 2015 as a guideline document under Chapter 19 of London’s Official Plan. The Plan identifies a number of strategic directions and “transformational projects”, along with implementation tools to assist in retaining and attracting business investment in London.

Specific policies in the Downtown Plan relevant to this site include Policy 5.2 which states *“Encourage the redevelopment of vacant sites to increase the resident and worker population downtown by discontinuing temporary-use zoning on these sites.”* As an owner of six office buildings in downtown London, in addition to the subject parking area, Sifton is cognizant and supportive of the goal *“to increase the resident and worker population downtown”*. However, it must be noted that residents and workers (and visitors) also require parking, particularly employees, until such time as a more robust or rapid transit system is in place. At present, many areas of the City have little or no public transit; therefore employees have few options but to drive. Consequently, parking is required and the subject site offers convenient parking for a number of Sifton’s office buildings downtown that do not have any underground or other / limited designated parking.

The site is also identified as a *“Priority Site”* for redevelopment on Map 5 in the Downtown Plan. However, preliminary feasibility analysis by Sifton indicates that the site area and configuration are limiting factors at present for the economic and technical feasibility of redeveloping the site for structured parking or other uses. This may change in the future as economic conditions and market demand evolve, or property consolidation occurs. However, the current use as a surface parking area for downtown building employees is considered to be the most practical and necessary function at present. In addition, there are a significant number of recent proposals and applications for high density apartments in the downtown core. It will be important to see the market uptake on these units before contemplating additional residential (or other) uses in order not to create a market glut.

4.0 SERVICES AND INFRASTRUCTURE

There are no servicing requirements as the proposed extension of the temporary zone is a continuation of the existing use. All servicing / infrastructure requirements were addressed at the time of the original site plan approval in 1995.

5.0 FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS

There are no financial claims or revenues associated within the site given that it is a continuation of the existing use.

6.0 OTHER INFORMATION

We are not aware of any issues that would require additional study or raise concerns.

7.0 BIBLIOGRAPHY

- City of London Official Plan
- The London Plan
- City of London Z.1 Zoning By-law
- City of London Downtown Master Plan (Adopted April 2015)