

Written Submission
Public Meeting Before the Planning and Environment Committee
13 August 2018
File: Z-8847
1146-1156 Byron Baseline Road

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Planning and Environment Committee
City of London
300 Dufferin Avenue
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Dear Committee Members,

As a longtime resident of Byron, I am not opposed to development in my community or to the intensification plans the City of London has adopted, but I strongly object to the building at the heart of Z-8847, particularly the suitability of the four-storey apartment structure proposed for the vacant lots at 1146 – 1156 Byron Baseline Road. In short, the building is inappropriate for the location. I will be affected by the proposed structure, as I live on September Lane, the street directly behind the land 2186121 Ontario Inc. would like to develop.

In addition, the *Planning Report* and *Urban Design Brief* prepared for 2186121 Ontario Inc. do not make a sufficiently strong case for the developer. Because the proposed project is not sensitive to, compatible with, or a good fit for the existing neighbourhood, I will address some of the shortcomings of the report and brief, especially the omissions and misleading statements.

General Planning Principles

The section of Byron Baseline Road between Boler Road and North Street has a commercial area at one end (Boler Road) and at the other end (North Street), one- and two-storey condominiums, as well as a three-storey apartment structure. All the dwellings in between are single-storey residential units (two of them appear to have usable attic space and several structures near North Street are semi-detached, single-storey buildings). In other words, although Byron Baseline is an arterial road, the portion under discussion runs through a predominantly low-density residential area.

In my view, normal planning for this section of Byron Baseline Road would have the commercial area at Boler and Byron Baseline stepped down through medium density housing (low-rise apartment structures followed by townhouses) to single-family residential dwellings farther away from the commercial area.

I suggest that the most appropriate location for a low-rise apartment structure along this portion of Byron Baseline Road would be immediately next to the commercial area at the intersection of Boler and Byron Baseline, as the existing structures there are a single-storey plaza on the southwest corner and a two-storey office building and a church on the east side:

Single-storey plaza on the southwest corner



Church on the northeast corner



Two-storey office building on the southeast corner



Specific Comments on the *Planning Report* and the *Urban Design Brief*

The *Planning Report* and *Urban Design Brief* are very similar, for November's *Urban Design Brief* repeats much of the text from the June *Planning Report*.

1. Neighbourhood Character Statements

The neighbourhood character statements should have included photos of the houses around the proposed apartment building to demonstrate that this four-storey structure provides continuity and harmony in architectural style with the adjacent single-storey and two-storey, pitched-roof buildings. I provide the missing photos below, illustrations which show that the 38-unit apartment building is incompatible with surrounding dwellings, for it is too large, that is, it is too tall and imposing, with too many units, to respect the character and density of the existing neighbourhood.

The heritage building immediately next to the proposed apartment structure (see the second illustration below) also needs to be considered in the design of any new building in order to provide what the City of London's Urban Design Principles (under Policies) refer to as "continuity and harmony in architectural style with adjacent uses which have a distinctive and attractive visual identity or which are recognized as being of cultural heritage value or interest." The developer's design clearly does not conform to this objective (the architect's sketch of the proposed structure is the first item below).

*Architect's representation of the face of the proposed apartment building
(taken from the Urban Design Brief)*



Heritage home to the immediate west of the proposed apartment structure



Single-storey house to the east of the proposed apartment structure



Single-storey houses across the street from the proposed apartment structure



*Houses on September Lane directly to the south of the proposed apartment structure
(photo from the Urban Design Brief)*



2. Compatibility Statements

The consultants working on behalf of 2186121 Ontario Inc. have said that the proposed apartment building is compatible with the adjacent neighbourhood primarily because of two existing developments, the condominiums at 1100 Byron Baseline Road and the three-storey apartment building at the corner of North Street and Byron Baseline Road, as well as the heritage home immediately to the west of the proposed apartment building.

The reports state:

“the proposed four storey apartment building is considered to be generally compatible with the low-profile character of the surrounding neighbourhood” (*Urban Design Brief*, p. 8), but two pages later they say “the project is unlike the single detached homes immediately adjacent,” before going on to suggest that the proposed building is “quite like the low-rise apartments located a short distance from the site (North St.) as well as the townhouse development at 1100 Byron Baseline Road. *The height and scale of the proposed building is in character with this development*” (*Urban Design Brief*, p. 10, italics mine). Unfortunately, the consultants did not provide photos to prove that the italicized statement is true, and the next four photos demonstrate that the new apartment building is clearly incompatible with all existing structures on the relevant portion of the road.

Please note that in their reports, the consultants specifically refer to: “the three storey townhomes of 1100 Byron Baseline Road” (*Urban Design Brief*, p. 2 and *Planning Report*, p. 4). However, these townhouses are not three-storey dwellings, for the photos I have included below show that the development is actually a mixture of single-storey and two-storey units. It is important to understand that the two-storey units in this development do not tower over the adjacent single-family, two-storey dwelling on September Lane (see the second photo below).

Representative condominiums at 1100 Byron Baseline Road

Single storey



*Two storey, showing in the background the two-story house at the end of September Lane
(south side of the street).*

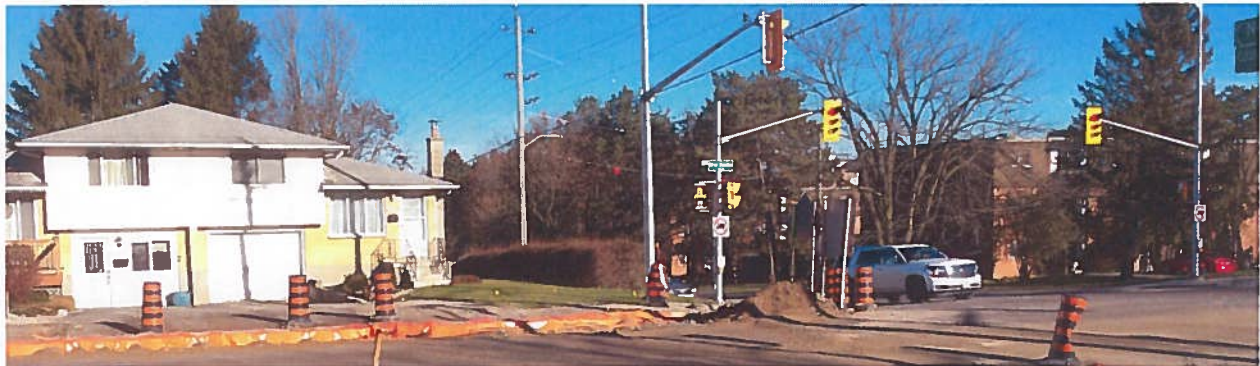
The condominiums do not tower over the adjacent house.



Furthermore, the consultants call the heritage home immediately to the west a three-storey structure: “adjacent to the west is a three storey Victorian design home ... with mechanical equipment on the roof” (*Urban Design Brief*, pp. 4-5). But the building is a two-storey house, with a peaked roof containing attic space (the pitch of the roof is similar to many modern designs, which are usually considered to be two-storey dwellings):



Moreover, the reports use the height of the existing three-storey apartment building at Byron Baseline Road and North Street as further justification for their proposed four-storey structure. However, this older apartment block has 8-foot ceilings, and because of the slope from Byron Baseline Road down to Commissioners Road, the building does not rise above the roofline of the single-storey house across the street from it at the corner of Byron Baseline Road and North Street, as this photo shows:



3. Incompatibility with Existing Intensification Projects Further Along Byron Baseline Road

Over the years, the City has approved intensification projects along Byron Baseline Road between Timber Drive and Boler Road, but all these developments consist of one- and two-storey dwellings. The older two (1294 Byron Baseline Road and the structures at the southwest corner of Griffith Street and Byron Baseline Road) contain two-storey townhouses, while the newer developments (1452 and 1499 Byron Baseline Road) consist of either one- or two-storey

buildings. The photos below provide further evidence of the incompatibility of the proposed four-storey apartment building with existing structures along Byron Baseline Road.

1294 Byron Baseline Road



Southwest corner of Griffith Street and Byron Baseline Road



1452 Byron Baseline Road



1499 Byron Baseline Road



4. Rebuilding Byron Baseline Road from Boler to North Street

The *Urban Design Report* mentions on page 11 that “the road [“a 2 lane arterial,” *Planning Report*, p. 10] is currently closed as it is being rebuilt to carry the increased traffic demands.”

However, even though the consultants assume that the City has taken additional traffic flow into consideration as part of their rebuilding project (I expect the City has studies to show that the proposed apartment building will not increase traffic congestion significantly), Byron Baseline is already far too busy for a small 2-lane arterial road to handle. Anyone who uses the street on a

regular basis at peak hours knows that the road cannot withstand even a slight rise in traffic volume. In fact, the road has not been rebuilt for “increased traffic demands” but has been altered to accommodate bicycle lanes in both directions.

5. Front Setback and Elevation

The proposed building is to sit right at the sidewalk, and it will be far closer to the street than other buildings on that section of Byron Baseline Road. It will stick out in an imposing fashion that certainly doesn't match the setback character or built form of the surrounding area. Moreover, since the proposed structure has a long, continuous front façade, it will intimidate pedestrians by towering over them. The building, then, does not enhance the pedestrian environment.

6. Rear Setback

The large parking lot at the rear of the proposed building is not compatible with the backyards of other properties on the street.

7. Privacy

A four-storey building with balconies at the front and back will deprive adjacent properties of their privacy, for sight lines from the balconies will allow the occupants to peer directly onto the neighbours' decks, pools, etc. Furthermore, the existing cedar hedge at the rear of the property is not tall enough, and never could be tall enough, to prevent peering. I note that the consultants have not provided a study that deals with the negative effects of peering.

8. Noise

The large parking lots at the rear and left of the building will be noisy, with cars coming and going at all hours, and they will be lit from dusk until dawn, causing further problems for neighbours. Another issue is garbage collection and storage via wheel-out bins. These will be an eyesore and will cause unnecessary noise.

9. Buffers

The existing cedar hedge at the rear of the property is not an adequate buffer to neighbouring properties, as it is not tall enough (6 meters at best compared to a 15 meter proposed height for the apartment building). Similarly, the road in front of the structure is also not an adequate buffer, for it is not wide enough to properly separate the apartment building from houses across the street. In addition, most of the existing trees are deciduous and will provide no buffering from November to April/May.

In conclusion, I believe there are many reasons why the proposed 15 meter, four-storey, 38-unit apartment building is incompatible with the surrounding area. I also note that the points I have raised in this submission are similar to those made by the panel of architects the City of London's Planning Services used to review and comment on the proposal. I attended the public meeting where they made their comments, and every architect found the project to have fundamental flaws. I urge committee members to obtain a detailed transcript of that meeting.

As I said earlier, I am not opposed to development or intensification, and perhaps a much more appropriate project for this location on Byron Baseline Road would be some form of townhouse or condominium development. I would, in fact, happily support intensification through townhouses or condominiums similar to what already exists on Byron Baseline Road.

Sincerely,

Robert Toft

cc. Anna Hopkins, Councillor (ahopkins@london.ca)