

June 16, 2019

To: Planning and Environment Committee

Cc: Michelle Knieriem

Re: Victoria Park Secondary Plan

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the draft Secondary Plan. As a resident on Wolfe Street, this has been a concern for several years now, and I look forward to continuing the dialogue.

First, I would like to applaud the Planning staff for a very comprehensive report and for their willingness to talk to all stakeholders on this issue. I felt that this report spoke well to the Planning Principles as approved by City Council.

I view Victoria Park, and the adjacent Reg Cooper Square as London's town square. As you think about the town squares around the world that you like to visit, most of them are surrounded by up to 5-6 storey buildings. This, in my opinion, would be the best aesthetic option around the park. It gives the park room to breathe. It lets the park dominate, not the architecture. Creating podiums is not the same. The height as stipulated by the heritage conservation plan (5 storeys) should be maintained.

The report talks about transitioning the height of buildings, yet I do not see any discussion about the transition from Richmond Street to the park itself. Going from 30 storeys on Richmond Street, to 25 stories on Clarence then to 0 in the park is a stark transition. Putting twin towers on that wedge of land creates a barrier to the park – regardless of whether you add extra “view corridors”. It is like how the Gardiner expressway cuts off Harbourfront from the City of Toronto. Yes, there should be intensification, but keep it to a mid-rise building.

There were several specific points I wish to comment on:

1. I would like to see elevations around the park. The aerial views make it difficult to really visualize the height of the buildings in relation to their surrounding buildings. In one instance, a 35 tower looks smaller than One London Place; in another, 2 25 storey towers that sit side-by-side look like are different heights.
2. Cultural Heritage (3.5) states “new development shall be compatible with existing setbacks” and General Built Form (3.6.1) states development “will reinforce the established built form edge”. I realize that this refers mostly to the dominant street view but would like to see this adhered to with the Wolfe street side of the SE corner development. The plans for this site to date illustrate the building following the footprint of the existing parking lot – but this does not conform to the built form edge of the street. It narrows it significantly.
3. This is the first that we have seen the idea to replace Centennial Hall with another high rise. The illustration shows a building with a long podium that interferes with Reg Cooper Square. This would nullify any potential for the creation of a real “town square” such as Nathan Phillips Square in Toronto. I think redevelopment of this site provides the City with a great leadership opportunity. City Hall and Centennial House create a strong skyline that should be matched by any new development around the “town square”. The demonstration view also highlights the loss of green landscaping at Reg Cooper Square, diminishing the feel that the park flows into the

square, especially during times like Sun Fest or Remembrance Day celebrations. Expanding the park into Reg Cooper square would certainly move the park more towards a Central Park feel.

4. Eliminate bonusing.
 - a. There is limited opportunity for public parking as we have been told it is too costly to go more than 2 storeys underground, and the design principles remove any ability for above ground parking on the park-facing elevations.
 - b. These units will likely to sold as condos (if not immediately, then in the long term), so there is really no opportunity for “affordable” housing (even at 80% these units would not be “affordable” by many).
 - c. As the BRT options for the northern sections did not get approved, any transit amenities would be very far in the future to be worth considering.
 - d. New pedestrian connections is not worth the “price” of having, in some cases a building almost double the allowable height (from 20 storeys to 35).
5. Section 3.10 states that high rises need to provide indoor and/or outdoor amenity space to take the pressure off the park. I would like to see the indoor provision removed. The landlord will provide the indoor amenities that they feel will help to “sell” their development to the consumer, the city does not need to stipulate that. The need for outdoor amenity space is vital due to the proliferation of dog-owners. The pressure on the park to be the toilet for hundreds of dogs takes away the enjoyment of sitting on the grass during some of the cultural offerings at the park. How does the grass even survive that much dog urine?

I look forward to continuing discussions with ALL Londoners about what Victoria Park means to them.

Sincerely,

Mary Ann Hodge

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