

September 15, 2020

To: Arielle Kayaba, Councillor Ward 13

Re: 556 Wellington Street

Dear Arielle,

I think we can all agree that we should have more residential density in the downtown core. More people on the streets will add a sense of vibrancy, provide more consumers to invigorate the Dundas Street corridor and assist in reducing urban sprawl. I would argue this is not a question of whether to intensify, but ensuring this intensification is done well.

I think we can also agree that Victoria Park is a jewel in the heart of the city. This is a reason that the properties around Victoria Park are highly valued, with developers wanting to maximize the value of the park for their developments.

Many developments are given catchy names like Foxfield, Warbler Woods, Kains Woods Terrace, and Hickory Heights. These are not named for the beautiful features that they conserve, but for what has been displaced to accommodate the development. What will be lost if this development is approved as proposed?

The crux of the issue as I see it, is that this property has been given "Downtown" zoning which comes with 100% lot coverage. However, this property is not in the downtown core, but in a residential neighbourhood. The Development Services Staff have recommended the proposal be refused because it:

- Is not responsive to the immediate heritage context and its character
- It does not conserve the designated heritage properties and does not respect their scale, form and heritage design.
- It does not appropriately transition to the adjacent properties and district neighbourhood; and
- It creates unacceptable negative impacts that are not sufficiently mitigated.

In other words, it meets zoning, but doesn't fit with the neighbourhood, and as there is no way to undo the Downtown zoning, we can respect the fact that this property is an integral part of the Victoria Park Heritage Conservation Plan.

Part of the heritage features of Victoria Park are its vistas and the historic buildings that surround the park. It is the ambiance of the park that brings tourists and Londoners out to the many festivals that are hosted in the park. It contains our history. It is where we host our Remembrance Day ceremonies. The West Woodfield heritage conservation plan notes that the "shady tree-lined streets and the picturesque Victoria Park are the core of West Woodfield. The area has changed over the years, but the character of the streetscape endures."

The report from LACH In December 2019, echoes the same issues that are still unaddressed by the revised proposal:

The LACH considers the conservation of the heritage character of the West Woodfield Heritage Conservation District to be fundamental to good land use planning for this site."

"This committee believes that the whole building is not in scale with a huge massing and height that bear no relation to the surroundings."

We could look to 250 Pall Mall as an example of a high density building that does not dominant the street scape. It is set back, integrates a convenient drop-off place for meal delivery and other short term users. As a Londoner who has participated in the Victoria Secondary Plan process, I have spent a lot of time considering both opposing views. As an environmentalist, I do believe in downtown density. But I also believe in creating livable cities. The core of Paris , considered the most populace city in the 19<sup>th</sup> century was designed to be no taller than 5 storeys. I think you will agree that Paris is considered a beautiful city, yet still has a dense and vibrant downtown.

In my humble opinion, it would improve the transition to the residential neighbourhood if the building:

- Lined up the Wolfe Street face of the building to the predominant built edge of the buildings on the street.

Instead of visually cutting off the street, this would provide better vistas from the park into the neighbourhood, enhancing the heritage character of the park, celebrating that tree-lined streetscape. COVID has also shown us the benefits of having outdoor space for retail uses. Setting the Wolfe St face to line up with the predominant built edge on Wolfe St would provide valuable outdoor space away from the busy-ness of Wellington St.

Is there really a need for more retail? If the goal is to encourage more people to shop downtown, having more potentially vacant retail properties does not help the situation. Residential townhouses on the main floor is an attractive option that again maximizes the value of the property and reduces vacant storefronts. This however, seems impossible to achieve since the current zoning requires retail and the developer is not interested in pursuing any variances that would make this possible.

- Is there any way to make it possible for city council to propose the developer change the use of the first floor from retail to residential without having to file for a variance?

Wolfe Street is not considered an arterial road, although it is a popular access point for people to the east of the park to access the park. Many years ago, the road was narrowed to discourage traffic. Not having access to the traffic study, but as someone living on this street, the addition of 405 new residential units, along with the existing parking capacity for Canada Life's office staff will turn this into a heavy use road. With close proximity to the traffic lights at Central and Wellington, traffic already gets congested at this intersection as Wellington. Whose responsibility will it be to put in traffic lights or at least a pedestrian crossing?

- Is there any way for the city to grant access for this property to Princess Ave so that vehicular traffic could be split between Wolfe and Princess streets – perhaps in one way and out the other? Could the city offer this instead of the developer needing to go through a variance process?

It is important to build a beautiful residence on the periphery of the park. It is also important that this building support the character of the park and the surrounding neighbourhood. I hope that you will vote to refuse this proposal and ask for something that creates a better interface between the park and the residential neighbourhood and transitions in keeping with the heritage value of this downtown gem.