

Mayor Ed Holder and Members of City Council  
City of London  
300 Dufferin Ave  
7<sup>th</sup> 2021  
London ON

Monday June

RE: File OZ 9157 Application for zoning amendments on Ridout Street

### **Preamble to the London Plan**

**“The plan sets out to conserve our cultural heritage and protect our environmental areas, hazard lands, and natural resources”.**

Dear Mayor Holder and Members of Council.

This letter comes in the middle of a very sad time for London and for our Muslim Community in particular, and one hesitates to move forward with ordinary business, but unfortunately the affairs of the Civic body still need to be addressed.

I have already written to Planning Committee about this development proposal and I spoke briefly at the Public Meeting held May 31<sup>st</sup>. I have been thinking about it a lot since the meeting and want to share my thoughts with you all. I was, at the outset, disturbed by the lack of real and timely consultation with the public over what must be one of the most controversial locations for a building in London.

The Public Participation meeting held May 31<sup>st</sup> was frustrating and unfair to the public. We were told at the beginning of the meeting that this development proposal had been in the works for YEARS! But no public meeting was offered till the very end of the process.

On top of that, the public was given no further opportunity to digest what Staff presented at the PEC meeting order to be able to question their assumptions, and the vote was taken right there and then.

The staff presentation, **as I was able to access it that night**, lacked several components, there was no LACH report included, nor was there a Heritage Impact statement included. A shadow study was mentioned but was not included. It was said the UTRCA had given approval “with conditions” but those conditions were not laid out for the public, so how we do know if the natural areas and flood plain issues are being properly addressed? We had to search for that information following the meeting. Councillors obviously had these complete studies to read for some time, but without being able to access them easily that night the public was not well equipped to ask questions. Indeed when a question was asked by a member of the public that received no clear answer, there was no chance to follow up, and this seemed most unsatisfactory to me.

Future development proposals in the historic core should be handled with more regard to real public participation.

I am still not certain that I have a complete understanding of what the City Planning Staff has recommended and what they have ignored. It seems to me that the requirements of the Downtown Heritage Conservation District Plan have not been stringently applied, nor could I find a reference to a Wind Study as mandated by the London Plan 803.4 and there are several other areas where the pertinent planning clauses do not seem to have been applied. I hope I am wrong about this.

I do see now that at least a Hold Zone has been recommended by Planning Staff, and hope that if this project does get the green light, that the strictest application of the Hold Zone requirements will be made.

A 40 storey tower looming over Harris Park, that dwarfs the historic buildings at its base and threatens to over shadow the glory of the Eldon House gardens, is to my mind, bad City planning.

Just because the historic buildings are not being demolished does not make this a non-heritage issue. The heritage in this area goes beyond the mere buildings to include the cultural landscape of Harris Park, Ridout Street and Eldon House, as well as stretching southwards to include the Old Courthouse and Gaol.

Just because the developer is offering an access point to Harris Park and is donating 0.49 hectares of land does not mean we have to accept the negative impact that such a tall building will have on the character of the riverside and Harris Park itself.

Just because the developer is offering to include some affordable housing units, does not mean this development will help London's affordable housing crisis. 80% of market value rent at even a modestly estimated \$2,000 per month would mean a unit would cost at least \$1,600. Well beyond the reach of the many Londoners who need a place costing \$1000.00 per month.

Just because the London Plan encourages intensification downtown does not mean we have to accept every application. The Bankers Row site already underwent an adaptive re-use project in the 1980s and the large addition built by Labatts really maximized the intensity that the site could take, in my opinion, and it did so stylishly and thoughtfully.

In the London Plan, dated 2016, clause 794 states... "We will connect strongly to our birthplace, at the Forks of the Thames, where we will create beautifully landscaped "people places" that Londoners will gravitate toward. And, we will cherish our heritage streetscapes that tell the story of our past, and create a unique and enriching setting that will give our core a strong sense of place and identity".

Does this proposal cherish our streetscapes? Or does it cynically take advantage of a site easily marketed for its stunning views at the expense of ruining a historic cultural landscape forever? Is this creating an enriching setting? I personally think not.

None of the Bankers Row historic buildings appear to be physically threatened as of now, but what guarantee does the City have that they will be properly maintained for the long-term future? There are already reports of a recent fire in one of these precious historic structures. I hope and trust there will be a written guarantee put in place to ensure their future well-being.

No one is arguing that we should not have towers in or near the downtown core, but it is critical to the ambiance that has been created in recent years **by the City itself at no small expense**, that two areas receive extra protection from enormous towers. Certain parts of the historic Forks area should remain free of high rise development, and the gem that is Victoria Park should also be protected from enormous overshadowing towers. **Much** public consultation has taken place over the Victoria Park secondary plan and it is a better document as a result. The Forks location deserves no less respect; even though the current development proposal comes from a private developer, the City surely has a say in how that area is developed.

The New Tricar tower on York Street is a case in point. As far as I know, that building went ahead with little or no objection from the wider community **because it is in the right place**, and in fact helps to frame the Forks of the Thames at one end, with the Harriston and the Blackfriars at the other.

The proposed Ridout tower would be much better placed one block further back, on Queens Avenue next to the new Court House, where it would be easier to build, where its impact would be lessened, and where it would have far more of a modern urban context. I found out yesterday that Farhi Holdings owns that lot!

I am personally asking you deny this application, because I believe it will ruin the historic character of the Forks district. It would be an example of bad City planning, with negative impacts on the natural environment of Harris Park and the historic buildings of Bankers Row- a highly valued National Historic Site

Thank you for the time you are taking to consider all the various points of view.

Yours sincerely

Susan Bentley  
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