

Proposed Development at Alvin and St. Clair Report No. 2 to Neighbourhood Residents

Report No. 2 has been prepared by Ted Mercer and John Shepherd.

It is a supplement to the initial Report to Neighbourhood Residents of September 10, 2007, which is also available in the "Reports on Proposal to Residents" area of the blog.

The final meeting of the Working Group, Wrap-up Meeting No. 7, was held on February 6, 2008. It was called by the City Planner to permit the Applicant to present revised plans to the Group. The plans are now in the hands of City Departments for staff review and comment.

Working Group Meeting:

About 10 residents attended the meeting, along with 11 other people including City Planning Staff, Councillor Michael Walker, the Applicant and his consultants.

Design Changes:

In late December 2007 the Applicant submitted revised plans to City Planning.

At this meeting, the Applicant itemized the changes that he has incorporated into the plan since the original application was filed in December 2006. Based on our notes taken at the meeting, we list here the significant design changes that have occurred since our September 10th report was written.

1. The height of the south condominium tower has been reduced, from 39 floors to 37. It will now be approximately 42% higher than the adjacent hexagonal Weston office building, rather than 49%
2. The height of the north condominium tower remains at 16 floors (earlier reduced from the original 32 stories).
3. The height of the Yonge Street condominium tower has been increased, from 14 floors to 15, so that it will now be the same height as the office building immediately to the south of it, at the corner of Yonge and St. Clair.
4. A third house, the second one west of Alvin on Heath St., has been purchased. The wider frontage on Heath permits a more attractive design for the streetscape and for the townhouses that will be integrated with the parking garage entrance. The existing building at the south-west corner of Heath and Alvin has not been acquired, and will not be a part of the development.

5. Blended Density has been reduced, from 6.6 times lot coverage to 6.3. (The density in the original application was 7.3). See the note below on “Blended Density”.
6. The number of condominium units, 470, seems to be about the same as what was estimated in our September 10th report. However, the Applicant feels that some buyers will combine units, so that the total number could turn out to be as low as 430. The original total, in December 2006, was 530.
7. The townhouses on Alvin will be individual units, with common dividing walls, and with “articulated” frontages, to make them architecturally interesting. The earlier plan featured two low-rise buildings that would have had lobbies.
8. The Alvin town houses will be set back one meter more than setback of the corner building at Alvin and Heath. This will permit planting of somewhat larger shade trees along Alvin.
9. Our September report described a green space running through the property from Yonge to Alvin. Arrangements are being made to transfer 8000 square feet to the City for a permanent park in this space. The Applicant will be committed to the City to spend \$2 million on park improvements and to also establish a fund for park maintenance.
10. Heath will be widened at Yonge to permit a left-turn lane for south-bound traffic from Heath. The land will come from the Yorkminster Church grounds.

Greenery:

An attractive series of landscape concepts was presented, showing summer, fall and winter settings. We believe that the Applicant will make every effort to make the central walkway, as well as the site perimeter, an attractive and appealing element of the development.

In particular, use will be made of ironwood and red oak trees, along with some ground-level evergreen plantings. Coniferous trees will not be used as they are generally not suitable for sitting or walking under.

Construction Issues:

There will be considerable disruption to the neighborhood during the construction period of about three years. Our September 10th Report (page 8) lists many of the issues. During construction, a neighbourhood liaison committee will be set up to address the residents' concerns. Other issues are already covered in bylaws, and several others will be addressed in the Section 37 agreement. In drafting this agreement, the City Planner will refer to our September 10th Report, notes from Working Group meetings and correspondence from residents. It was emphasized by the residents that dump and ready-mix trucks must enter and exit the site directly from Yonge Street only.

Blended Density:

The Planner stated that the permitted blended density, under the most recent Official Plan, is 4.0 times coverage (compared to the Applicant's requested 6.3 times coverage). In our September 10th Report, and in the Planner's March 8th 2007 Preliminary Report, this figure was stated as 3.1 times the lot area. Evidently, the difference is due to confusion over the areas of different segments of the property, some of which have higher permitted densities than others.

Councillor Michael Walker:

Councillor Walker was optimistic that the Wittington project will be the last site for intensification in the neighbourhood bounded by Yonge, St. Clair, Glen Elm and the ravine. It is not presently clear exactly how this will be achieved.

Residents' Comments:

Two residents expressed concerns that the Applicant, with no justification, is still trying to cram too much floor space on to the property : that is, both density and building heights are much too high compared to other tall buildings in the surrounding area that were constructed with consideration of densification because of their proximity to the subway station.

Our September 10th Report (pages 4 and 5) provides data, based on the Applicant's own figures, and analysis to support our view. We asked for, but have never received, a logical explanation as to how the Applicant arrived at his proposed density coverage, which is now 6.3. This is still 15% greater than the 5.5 times coverage that we consider to be sufficient "densification". See page 5 of the September 10th Report.

One resident, living on Alvin, felt that adding 470 units to this neighbourhood is far too many and will more than double the present population.

One resident, living on Ferndale, expressed concern over afternoon shadow effects.

Another resident suggested that the north sidewalk on St. Clair, immediately opposite of the library be narrowed, so as to widen St. Clair at the turn. This will make it easier for westbound traffic to turn north onto Alvin, and will improve visibility for southbound Alvin traffic when making left turns onto St. Clair. He stated that traffic gridlock which already exists at this corner will only become worse with the arrival of this project and that every possible step must be taken to alleviate the situation.

Next Steps:

The Planner stated that copies of the application have now been distributed to various City departments, and that he is now waiting for comments and concerns from these departments, relative to the various bylaws and regulations that they administer. As soon as these are received, he will draft a final report containing a recommendation as to whether to approve the project or whether to ask for changes. The report should be ready sometime in April 2008.

After this, probably sometime in May, Councillor Walker will host a public community evening meeting, at which the Applicant will describe the project. The report will then be presented at a Community Council meeting, at which residents and the Applicant can make 5-minute deputations. These meetings are usually held at City Hall during the daytime.

Following the Community Council meeting, the Planner's Final Report will be submitted to City Council for approval or rejection. There will follow a 20 day period during which the Applicant or residents can file notices of appeal to the OMB.

Mercer/Shepherd Comments:

Although we appreciate the many improvements that the Applicant has made to the project, as a result of the meetings of the Working Group, the proposed height and density are still the most critical issues, and are still too high. The views that we expressed on the point, in our September 10th Report, have not changed.

The Planner's Report will have a significant bearing on the outcome. Now is the time to write **again** to the Chief Planner to express your concerns. His address is:

Gary Wright
Acting Chief Planner & Executive Director
Toronto City Hall
12th fl. E., 100 Queen St. W.
Toronto ON M5H 2N2

You can also express your opinions on this blog, which is monitored by the Planner, as well as the Applicant. But most importantly, do write to the Planner as well.

After the public meeting, it will be important to have well thought-out deputations at the Community Council meeting. But first things first. Write the Planner now.

For anyone who may receive a printed copy of this report, the blog address is

<http://30alvin.blogspot.com/>

Ted Mercer and John Shepherd
February 8, 2008