



Public Meeting – September 16, 2013

PRESENTATION ON CONVERSIONS

The Sandy Hill context

- Unique Confluence of Factors:
 - Generous zoning and rules pertaining to conversions;
 - Province-wide objective of intensification;
 - Proximity to the expanding University and a high demand for student housing.
- These conditions have made it very profitable to buy single family homes and transform them into massive multi-unit complexes.
- Conversions have resulted in an increase in density with an impact on noise, garbage, and property standards.

Issue: Maintaining the character of Sandy Hill

- The objectives of the Secondary Plan reflect the character of SH:
 - Preservation and enhancement of SH as an attractive residential neighbourhood, especially for families
 - Modest growth
 - Provision for a broad range of socio-economic groups
 - Maintenance of both the local functions and the functions that serve the broader area
- SH has a strong heritage and historical character.
- Currently, most conversions are eroding that character.



Issue: The definitions of “conversion” and “demolition”

- The definition of ‘conversion’ relies on the interpretation of ‘demolition’.
- As currently applied, ‘demolition’ only refers to full demolition – making all partially or significantly demolished buildings simple ‘conversions’.
- Developers can therefore bypass rules applicable to new construction and infill to build bulkier buildings, while keeping very little of the original structures.
- ‘Conversion’ should have a measure of how much of the original structure must remain intact.

Example of Infill as Conversion

Before



After



Example of Infill as Conversion



Issue: Scale and Massing



Due to the permissive rules for conversion and generous allowances for height & setbacks in the current zoning, converted buildings:

- Are disproportionately tall & massive;
- Dwarf the neighbouring dwellings;
- Are out of character;
- Impact access to light & privacy;
- Do not leave any room on the lot for soft landscaping and trees.



Loss of Light and Privacy

Massing, height and setbacks in the rear



Disproportionately Tall & Massive

Initial structure is doubled in size



Dwarfs the neighbouring dwellings

Addition is much taller than initial structure



Out of character

Addition is massive and completely dwarfs the original house

Issue: Number of units & bedrooms; Increased density

- Restrictions on the number of units and bedrooms are not stringent enough.
- Permissive rules on height and setbacks coupled with the permissive zoning allow for massive conversions with 20 – 24 bedrooms.
- Bedrooms are small and common living space limited.
- Density is inappropriate for the size of the lot and leads to poor living conditions and issues of noise, garbage and property standards.
- Limits the versatility of the units and the diversity of residents.

Issue: Deficient rooming house rules; Bylaw enforcement

- Units with a high density of unrelated tenants give rise to special issues. (for ex: safety, noise, waste disposal, property standards). They need to be regulated and inspected regularly.
- The current definition of a rooming house is vague and narrow and it is difficult to have a dwelling designated as a rooming house and the corresponding rules applied.
- Noise and garbage bylaws are enforced only after significant reporting efforts by residents and are never proactively enforced.

What is desirable: Modest conversions, moderate density

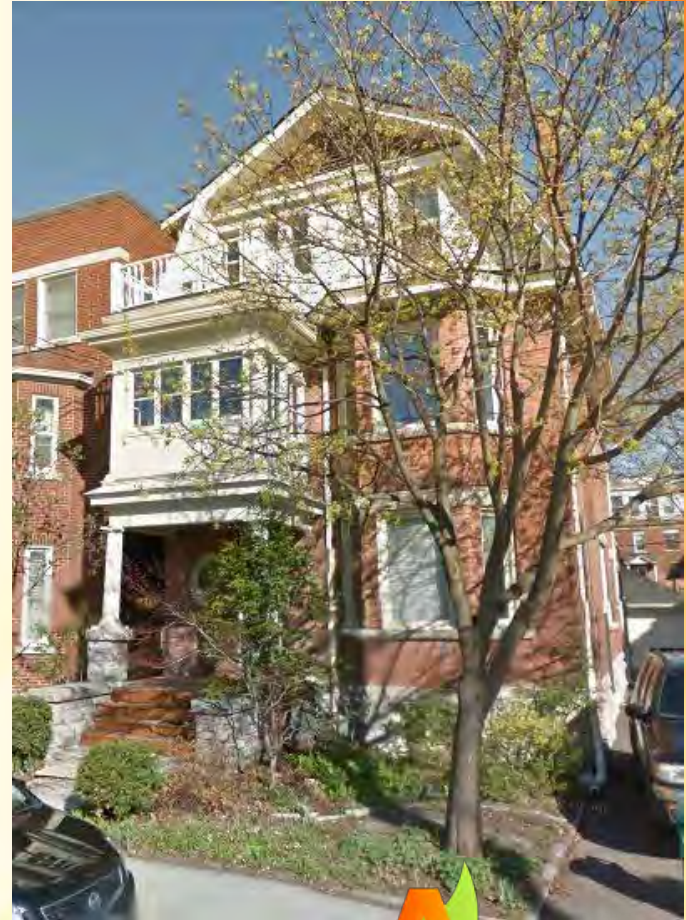
We would like to see:

- Less drastic expansions of existing structures.
- Buildings that are proportionate in height and massing to the size of the lot, the neighbouring buildings and the overall neighbourhood.
- Subdivision of an existing building with minimal alterations to the outside.
- Appropriate density for the lot, and per unit, according to floor space.



What is desirable: High property standards, Character, Diversity

- Well maintained properties with well-organized storage for bicycles, garbage and recycling.
- Units that are versatile and can be rented by a variety of occupants.
- Conversions that maintain and enhance the character of the neighbourhood.
- More owner occupied units.
- More green space and trees.



Some proposed solutions

- Limit the scope of the definition of conversions and only include buildings that remain largely intact – treat all other projects as infill.
- Reduce height and setback allowances in the zoning.
- Impose minimum percentages of amenity space indoors, and of soft landscaping outdoors.
- Limit and lower the number of units per building.
- Impose a minimum requirement of overall square footage in proportion to the number of bedrooms to ensure adequate shared living space.
- Set up an incentive program to encourage owner occupied conversion projects.

Some proposed solutions

- Clarify and expand the definition of rooming house, regulate dwellings housing 4 or more unrelated tenants, and conduct regular inspections.
- Revise zoning to remove the rooming house provision in many areas of SH.
- Make the planning process more rigorous for all infill and conversions: make site plan mandatory, create an expert committee, consult the community/associations, institute signage obligations and comment periods, assign a dedicated planner and building code inspector team to a vulnerable community.
- Modernize the Sandy Hill Secondary Plan following a community visioning exercise and uphold it.

Importance of addressing the issue: Sandy Hill is at a critical stage

- Most conversions are resulting in rapid intensification and loss of available single family homes and duplexes.
- New short term residents are mostly from a single demographic.
- There is an exodus of long-term residents and families.
- Long-term residents are the back-bone of a neighbourhood and provide its stability and diversity.
- The departure of most long-term residents will lead to significant social and urban problems in SH.
- The decimation of the community would be a tremendous loss for the residents themselves, but also for the City and the University.