



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

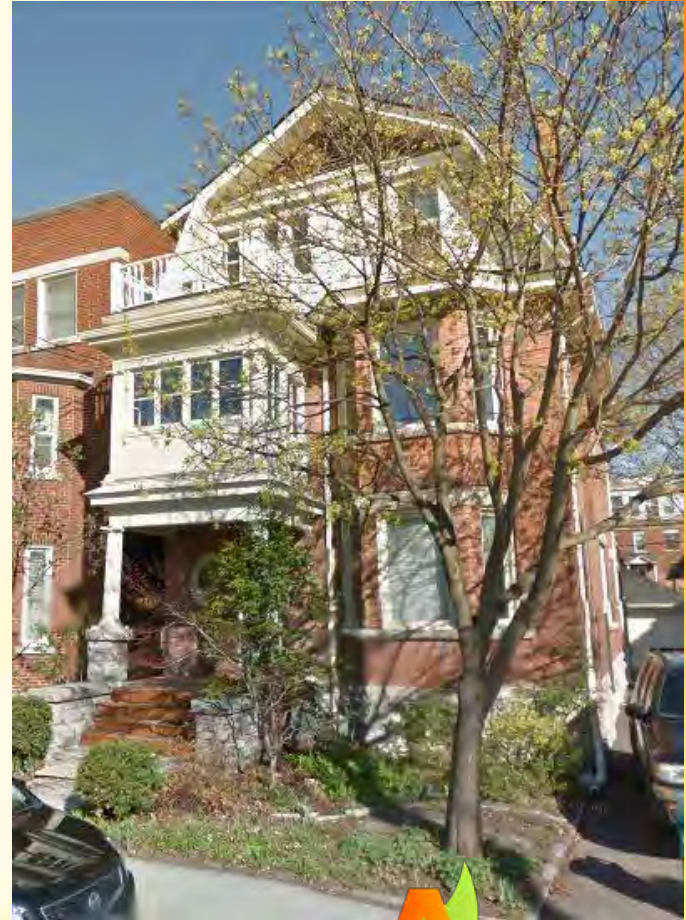
We would like to see:

- 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.