

# As We Heard It Report

## Westboro Infill Zoning Study

### 2<sup>nd</sup> Discussion Paper – April-June 2020

In April 2020, Staff posted a second discussion paper to outline a general direction for the growth of the Westboro study area, including potential zoning standards. This paper was made available for comment through June 15<sup>th</sup>, 2020, and is still available for review at <https://ottawa.ca/en/city-hall/public-engagement/projects/westboro-infill-zoning-study>.

The Discussion Paper was divided into two main sections: the “Vision for Westboro”, which outlines the potential direction for the study area, within the context of both the current Official Plan and the New Official Plan presently under development, and “Potential Zoning Standards” that could be implemented to achieve the principles in this vision.

Comments were received from 24 individuals, as well as comments from the Westboro Community Association and the Greater Ottawa Home Builders Association.

A summary of the comments received from residents is available in this report. This summary is divided generally into common topics that were addressed.

In general, comments ranged from some in support of the general direction laid out in the paper to general opposition to this direction, including as it relates to any increase to permitted density within the study area.

Each topic covered in this report will include some discussion of how the topic was covered within the Discussion Paper, as well as a Staff response to the comments provided.

### **Major Streets vs Local Streets**

- commenters expressed concerns with taller buildings at intersections on local roads – will not reduce impact as much as thought
- some commenters suggested that maximum building height should not be higher than three storeys, even on major streets
- one commenter suggested that buildings should not be higher than 2 storeys regardless of location of lot
- concerns about which streets are considered major streets e.g. Roosevelt as a major street
- some commenters suggested that there are challenges for some of the “main roads” noted in the study

### **Staff Response:**

The location of “major streets” within the study area was determined based on roads that are presently designated as “Collector” or “Major Collector” roads within the current Official Plan. Churchill Avenue, in particular, is a “Major Collector” road and represents the primary north-south route within the study area.

The New Official Plan, which is intended to be brought to Planning Committee and Council by 2021, aims to establish a new policy framework under which to guide development within the City as a whole. Once the new Official Plan is established, it will also be necessary to create a new Comprehensive Zoning By-law for the entire city in order to set predictable rules and standards for development.

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### **Building Size and Height**

- larger scale (3 or 4 storey) apartment buildings will impact adjacent single family homes. One comment in particular suggested that “no amount of buffering or landscaping” will mitigate these concerns, including those relating to massing or building shadowing.
- one commenter suggested that 3 storey building heights are acceptable, provided that they include a pitched roof. The concern is less building height and rather that current zoning restricts height based on the number of units.
- some commenters oppose any increase to building height
- some commenters were not necessarily opposed to direction for major streets, but felt that heights for “transition areas” within same block as major street should be same as local roads instead
- in general, there are continued concerns about the size and massing of infill. Multiple commenters referred to the “boxy” appearance of new infill.
- one commenter felt that increased requirements for rear yards will not significantly change massing issues
- other commenters suggested that rear yard increases will unreasonably restrict ability to construct additions to existing homes, or otherwise unreasonably restrict the size of new buildings.
- one commenter expressed concern that any rear yard based on averaging will not be implemented properly – e.g. new infill next to recent infill will get the benefit of reduced setback. If 20% reduction, another new infill can come in next to one and set back even closer to rear lot line.

### **Staff Response:**

In general, the predominant characteristic within local streets, outside of major streets such as Churchill Avenue, Byron Avenue, and Dovercourt Avenue, is a building height of no greater than two storeys. Zoning for much of the study area outside of major streets will be considered with this characteristic in mind.

Staff also recognize that the characteristics present among many such streets is the predominance of detached homes, which typically contain pitched roof forms as

opposed to flat roof forms. Should a taller height than the “typical” two-storey height be permitted via this study on local streets, the intent is to base this to the extent possible on the provision of a pitch roof as opposed to a flat roof.

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### **Density and Permitted Uses**

- multiple commenters expressed the desire to preserve neighbourhood as it is by limiting “overintensification”. These commenters suggested that increasing permitted # of units or allowing more uses is not consistent with that.
- the expectation among some commenters is that the Interim Control By-law would result in further limits to permitted uses within the present zoning, and not higher density as is contemplated by the study.
- inappropriate to consider more flexible zoning when rate of development is already high
- a common comment is “it’s not the design of buildings, it’s the number of homes/units”
- some also suggested that “Westboro is comprised mainly of single and semi-detached dwellings – anything else would not be keeping in character with the neighbourhood”
- some concern that there will be a rapid and unchecked transformation of the neighbourhood if changes to the zoning to allow density do not also occur elsewhere
- the recent approval of the City’s new growth management plan warrants re-evaluation of the permitted level of density contemplated for the area
- how many sites will be candidates for redevelopment over the life of the upcoming OP?
- some commenters expressed concerns with or objections to basement dwelling units or secondary dwelling units
- some commenters are generally supportive of principles of the paper, including with respect to multi-unit housing
- one comment in this regard: “The proposals for future siting of different styles of multi-unit housing and the details of how that can be accomplished while retaining the most attractive features of the neighbourhood are both elegant and admirably detailed.”

### **Staff Response:**

Staff recognize that the question of density and permitted uses is a controversial topic, particularly within the context of multi-unit development within Westboro, which formed the impetus behind the Interim Control By-law.

To this end, Staff would note that the City adopted a Growth Management Plan in May 2020 to set the general framework for where new growth and development will generally be directed within Ottawa. Over the life of the new Plan, it is expected that over half of Ottawa’s new growth will be accommodated in existing neighbourhoods, primarily

through infill development. This includes an intensification target that is expected to increase to 60 per cent by the end of this period.

While it is unreasonable to expect that infill will be concentrated within a specific neighbourhood, it is reasonable to expect that the neighbourhood will evolve as growth occurs. It is important to manage the impacts of growth and infill in order to ensure that the important characteristics of Westboro, including its greenspace and neighbourhood interaction, are maintained and enhanced, but it is Staff's position that appropriate growth requires a diversity of dwelling types, and cannot be sufficiently or sustainably accommodated through detached or semi-detached dwellings alone.

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### **Trees, Greenspace, and Landscaping**

- most people who commented have continued concerns about impact of trees – many feel that that none of the zoning measures proposed will do enough to protect them
- some suggested that any landscape requirements in rear yard should allow ability to provide sheds or small structures, where they don't have potential to impact trees
- greenspace should take precedence over parking in rear yards
- some other commenters, understand need to increase greenspace but supports parking in rear yards

### **Staff Response:**

Staff acknowledge the continued concerns of residents with respect to the impact of infill development on existing mature trees, and also acknowledge that this has been a common comment throughout the study. The focus on landscaping requirements within the rear yard as a potential zoning measure is intended in part to ensure that there is land available to support both existing mature trees as well as allow space for planting of new trees.

The new Urban Tree By-law is intended to come into effect this year, which is also intended to assist with issues relating to tree planting and protection.

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### **Parking**

- there is a lack of confidence that car ownership will decrease enough to justify low or no on-site parking
- general sentiment that traffic and parking issues are already high and more development without parking will exacerbate those issues
- one commenter suggested that if parking cannot be provided then City should at least further restrict street parking on narrow streets – and “if that means parking permits so be it”
- other commenters support further reduction of parking minimums – not just for first 12 units as is presently the case

- one commenter noted the need for minimum bicycle parking requirements (and greater bicycle parking in general) as an alternative to vehicular parking
- residents generally commented that permeable/porous paving requirement is a good idea, and that the City should be able to enforce it.

**Staff Response:**

As has been noted in previous documents, on-site parking is presently not required under the Zoning By-law for residential buildings containing twelve units or fewer. It is not proposed to change this via this study.

It is recognized that parking will be a desired feature associated with some infill within the neighbourhood, both on the developer end as well as by some commenters within the study. However, the comments provided by residents throughout the process are clear in highlighting greenspace and space for trees, in particular existing mature trees, as a priority within Westboro. Emphasizing space for surface parking, whether in front or rear yards, reduces the space available for trees and greenspace.

Staff recognize that there are cases where on-site parking in association with a development can be shown to be appropriate. However, in general, it is Staff's position that parking is not an absolute necessity, and is something to be provided where it is demonstrated that potential impacts to any other priorities, including space for mature trees and other functions of the building, are adequately mitigated.

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**Other Zoning or Process Issues**

- COVID-19 pandemic requires a rethink of assumptions/projections re: housing trends
- proper application of the intent of zoning rules, in particular at the Committee of Adjustment, remains a concern among many residents
- one commenter raised the concern of waste management, suggesting that zoning rules for it should apply to all dwelling types

**Staff Response:**

With respect to concerns with respect to the Committee of Adjustment, a property owner is permitted under the Planning Act to apply for a Minor Variance or Consent application. As acknowledged from the first Discussion Paper, 70% of the development that occurred within the study area from 2015 to 2018 was subject to approval of a Minor Variance.

One of the tests required for a Minor Variance to be approved is that it must be demonstrated to meet the intent of the Zoning By-law. It is the intent of staff to ensure that the intent of rules introduced via this study are clear to follow and apply, to assist the Committee of Adjustment with their proper application when a Minor Variance proposal is brought forward.

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## Issues Not Governed by the Zoning By-law

- paper could benefit from a discussion of cycling infrastructure potential
  - recreational resources and other similar resources and infrastructure will need to be added as the neighbourhood grows
  - construction of safe and accessible transportation networks
  - some commenters suggested the need for wider sidewalks, as well as addition of sidewalks on streets that do not currently have them
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## Comments from the Greater Ottawa Home Builders' Association (GOHBA)

Comments were submitted on behalf of the Greater Ottawa Home Builders' Association on June 15, 2020. The following is a summary of these comments:

- Suggests that there is not a distinct vision for Westboro articulated in the Discussion Paper beyond improved urban tree canopy, increased density and walkability, and that these are goals that apply across Ottawa in general.
- Recommends height be measured based on the number of storeys rather than a maximum building height in metres as is presently used in zoning.
- Is of the opinion that taller building heights should be permitted on major streets, as follows:
  - Churchill Avenue – 6.5 Storeys
  - Byron Avenue, Clare Avenue, Dovercourt Avenue west of Churchill – 4.5 storeys
- Where the potential for neighbourhood commercial uses is proposed, infill developments need to ensure that there are entrances at grade, and compliant with accessibility requirements.
- Suggests that rear yard setbacks are fine as currently existing, and do not feel that measures involving rear yard averaging are practical or easily applicable
- Suggests the following options with respect to parking:
  - *“Allow surface parking, whether located in a rear yard or in a front yard as an alternative to attached garages. Surface parking increases the opportunity to have lively facades facing the street. Surface parking can be replaced over time with soft landscaping and trees.”*
  - *“Encourage parkades with retail on the main floor and parking on higher floors, where the façade disguises use (which is well-used downtown). Above ground structures can be converted to different uses at an appropriate point in the future.”*
  - *“Encourage buildings to provide underground parking for tenants and the public.”*
  - *“Develop policies and programs that support small community or neighbourhood parking lots.”*
  - *“Allow off-site parking a short distance away for a designated cluster of homes. This would provide the city with the dense housing typology it desires, and the parking lot could be developed at a later date.”*
- Concern with the potential for temporary provisions and suggests that any such provisions should include clear transition policies.

- Notes that Site Plan Control approval has a major impact on development costs and consequently the affordability of units created in a residential building. Suggests that exemptions from Site Plan Control should be considered as a potential option.

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### **Comments from the Westboro Community Association (WCA)**

Comments were submitted from the Westboro Community Association on June 14, 2020. The following is a summary of these comments:

- The WCA notes the following issues as “key principles”:
  - Trees/greenspace – *“where possible and viable”*
  - Street animation – *“avoid boxy designs (how?); streetscape (doesn’t work now)”*
  - Housing – *“ensuring attractive (does happen occasionally but not often)”*
  - Walkability – *“being affected by loss of tree canopy; also narrow streets in winter become even narrower and not very walkable.”*
- Other concerns noted include *“the building envelope, finding more recreational space, hard landscaping, rear yards, building height and dwelling types (such as triplexes, long semis and low rise apartment buildings).”*
- Acknowledges that the study is restricted to the area covered by the Westboro Interim Control By-law, however expressed concerns that development pressure exists throughout the neighbourhood – both inside and outside the Interim Control Area
- Concern that the City does not support residents at the Committee of Adjustment, typically expressing “no concerns” with minor variance applications

Text for web: The comment period on the 2nd Discussion Paper recently completed in June 2020. Staff have provided a summary of the comments received in an As We Heard It report.