

WESTBORO INFILL STUDY

DISCUSSION PAPER

SEPTEMBER 2019



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DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

The Following questions will be asked in this paper.

1. What characteristics of Westboro should we...

- Preserve?
 - Aim to minimize or eliminate over time?
 - Enhance?
 - Introduce or re-introduce?
2. Are there examples of infill that do a good job of complementing or enhancing the neighbourhood's character? How, in your view, did these projects do this?
 3. Are there examples of infill that detract from the neighbourhood's character? How, in your view, did these projects do this?
 4. Westboro is a neighbourhood that is in close proximity to a variety of services, with parts of the neighbourhood in proximity to rapid transit. With this in mind, how can we ensure a range of housing options that are reasonably affordable to a wide range of Ottawa's population?
 5. How can multi-unit dwellings (including triplexes) be designed in such a way as to better reflect and enhance the character of the neighbourhood?
 6. If a multi-unit dwelling were designed so as to be similar in appearance and configuration to existing adjacent houses, what would be your opinion of the proposal?

7. Greenspace and trees are often seen as important functions of rear yard space. What do you consider to be other primary functions of rear yard space? How can these functions be achieved while adequately preserving greenspace?
8. How can the negative impacts of parking be better mitigated for new developments?
9. Given that automobile use drives demand for on-site parking, how can Westboro transition towards lower automobile use? What impacts can infill have in this transition?



BACKGROUND & STUDY AREA

In October of 2018, Council adopted an Interim Control By-law covering a significant portion of the Westboro neighbourhood. The intent of this By-law, as stated in the Motion to Council, is to review “the land-use policies associated with triplex dwellings and dwellings that are over 400 square metres in Gross Floor Area within the area described below and assess the suitability and compatibility of these housing typologies in the context of intensification within the study area”.

Triplices are one form of infill development that occurs in Westboro. However, they are not the only form of infill encountered. From 2015 to 2018, triplexes have represented one in six of all infill buildings within the study area, with the remainder comprising mainly of single or semi-detached dwellings.

As such, the issue of infill and development in Westboro goes beyond the specific issue of three-unit and multi-unit dwellings within the neighbourhood, representing an opportunity to establish a larger vision for Westboro, and to establish new policies and regulations that are in line with that general vision.

Existing Policy and Zoning Standards

The majority of the study area is located within the R3R zone – Residential Third Density Zone, Subzone R. This zone permits a range of low-density residential uses, with a three-unit dwelling being the highest-density use permitted.

The minimum lot size required in most cases is a lot width of 12 metres and a lot area of 360 square metres. Most uses within the R3R zone are subject to a maximum building height of 8 metres, with the exception of three-unit dwellings, which instead are permitted a maximum height of 11 metres.

The issue of infill and development in Westboro goes beyond the specific issue of three-unit and multi-unit dwellings within the neighbourhood.

Historically, the zoning permissions in this area have remained mostly the same dating back to the City's first comprehensive zoning by-law established in the 1960s, except that prior to 2008, triplexes and similar multi-unit dwellings were permitted only via conversion of existing buildings, as opposed to via purpose-built construction.

The study area is within the Mature Neighbourhoods Overlay (Infill 1), which recognizes the main character and use of lands along a street and attempts to ensure that new development fits into the look along that street. Infill development, as well as certain home additions and the creation of new driveways, require that a Streetscape Character Analysis (SCA) must be undertaken that determines the existing dominant character of specific land use attributes affecting the look along the street.

The focus of the Mature Neighbourhoods regulations is on the use of lands in the front and corner side yards between a house and the street, and between houses along the street, including:

- the amount of front and corner yard landscaping,
- the amount of lot width taken up by the driveway,
- the location of parking on the property, and
- the location of the front door.

The rules also recognize newer forms of development including ‘wrap-around dwellings’ on corner lots where some units face one street and others face the other street, and long semi-detached dwellings, where one dwelling unit is behind the other.

All lots within the Mature Neighbourhoods Overlay that are zoned R1-R4 are also subject to the Alternative Provisions within the Urban Area introduced under the second phase of the Low-rise Infill Housing Study (Infill 2). The Infill 2 rules affect:

- the building height,
- rear and side yard setbacks, and projections into these yards,
- projections above the maximum building height, including rooftop access and terraces, and
- rear yard amenity areas.

The purpose of these rules is to limit building height and mass, consider privacy issues, sun obstruction, loss of permeable surfaces and soft vegetation, and to allow for new dwellings and additions to existing dwellings that fit in amongst their neighbouring properties.

These regulations will continue to apply to the study area and to the Westboro neighbourhood as a whole, and there will be no direct changes to those provisions as a result of this study.

The study area is within the “General Urban Area” designation of the City’s Official Plan. Policy 3.6.1 of the Official Plan states the following with respect to residential infill and redevelopment within the General Urban Area:

5. The City supports intensification in the General Urban Area where it will complement the existing pattern and scale of development and planned function of the area. The predominant form of development and intensification will be semi-detached and other ground-oriented multiple unit housing. When considering a proposal for residential intensification through infill or redevelopment in the General Urban Area, the City will:

1. *Assess the compatibility of new development as it relates to existing community character so that it enhances and builds upon desirable established patterns of built form and open spaces;*
2. *Consider its contribution to the maintenance and achievement of a balance of housing types and tenures to provide a full range of housing for a variety of demographic profiles throughout the General Urban Area;*

There is an opportunity through this study to define a specific vision for Westboro.

The above-noted policy generally outlines the City's interests with respect to how urban neighbourhoods such as Westboro should grow and develop. The focus of this policy is on ensuring that multiple forms of housing, whether rental or ownership tenure, are sufficiently being provided for.

Taken together, the R3R zone and the Official Plan policies provide a future picture of a neighbourhood where multi-unit ground-oriented buildings gradually become more common on local streets than they are today. This is in keeping with the location of this neighbourhood within the inner urban area, with excellent access to transit service, and a high degree of commercial activity. The presence of these factors means that it is reasonable, and directly encouraged by City policy, to anticipate the neighbourhood's gradual transformation away from a form predominantly consisting of detached dwellings and towards housing forms that support greater density and a mix of housing types.

As such, and despite the fact that triplexes that have recently been built within the City have generated legitimate concerns, a broad downzoning of the neighbourhood is not an appropriate solution to this issue. Such a change would be in contravention of Policy 2.2.2 of the Official Plan. However, the establishment of specific policies and regulatory standards for the neighbourhood will more easily allow the City to manage expectations about the growth of the neighbourhood, in particular, with respect to where that growth may be focused.

Housing Trends Within the Study Area

As per data provided by CMHC (Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation), the study area has consistently experienced a housing vacancy rate of less than 1 percent, with the vacancy rate in 2017 being roughly 0.6%. Note that the study area is located within "South Westboro", however "North Westboro", as well as the City wide rates, are included in this table for comparison.

Vacancy Rates (%) By Neighbourhood, 2010-2017

	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
Hampton Park	0.5	1.4	1.5	**	**	**	**	0.5
Westboro North/Tunney's Pasture	0.4	0.9	2.0	1.9	1.7	1.7	1.7	1.5
Westboro South	0.5	0.4	0.6	0.9	0.5	1.5	0.9	0.6
Ottawa	1.7	1.5	2.7	3.0	2.8	3.5	3.1	1.7

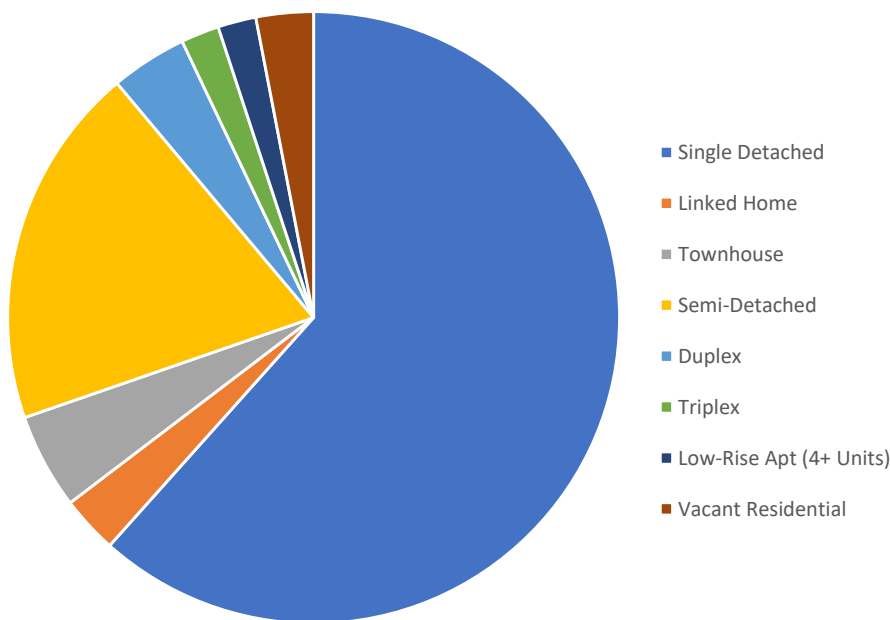
Source: Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation. Note that values indicated in "***" denote years where there is insufficient data to reliably confirm a vacancy rate.

For comparison, a 3% vacancy rate is generally considered to be an appropriate rate from a housing supply and affordability perspective. The city-wide vacancy rate for Ottawa is 1.7% as of 2017.

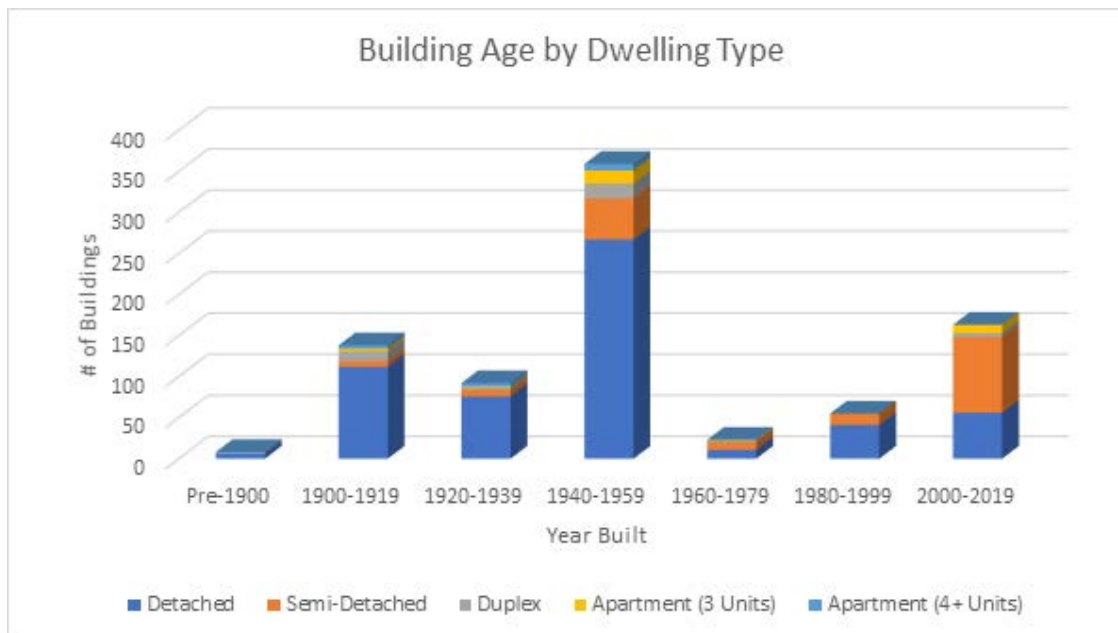
While vacancy rates fluctuate from year to year, the study area has consistently seen a 1% vacancy rate or lower over a period of nearly a decade. The only notable exception is 2015, where the City-wide vacancy rate was also at its highest during this period. A consistently low vacancy rate is an indicator of high housing demand, and an indicator of need for additional housing supply. It is this demand that represents a major driver of the infill that has taken place.

Another important consideration is the existing housing stock. The existing mix of housing within the study area consists primarily of detached dwellings, although there exist a variety of housing types within the area as a whole.

Mix of Housing Types



Building Age by Dwelling Type



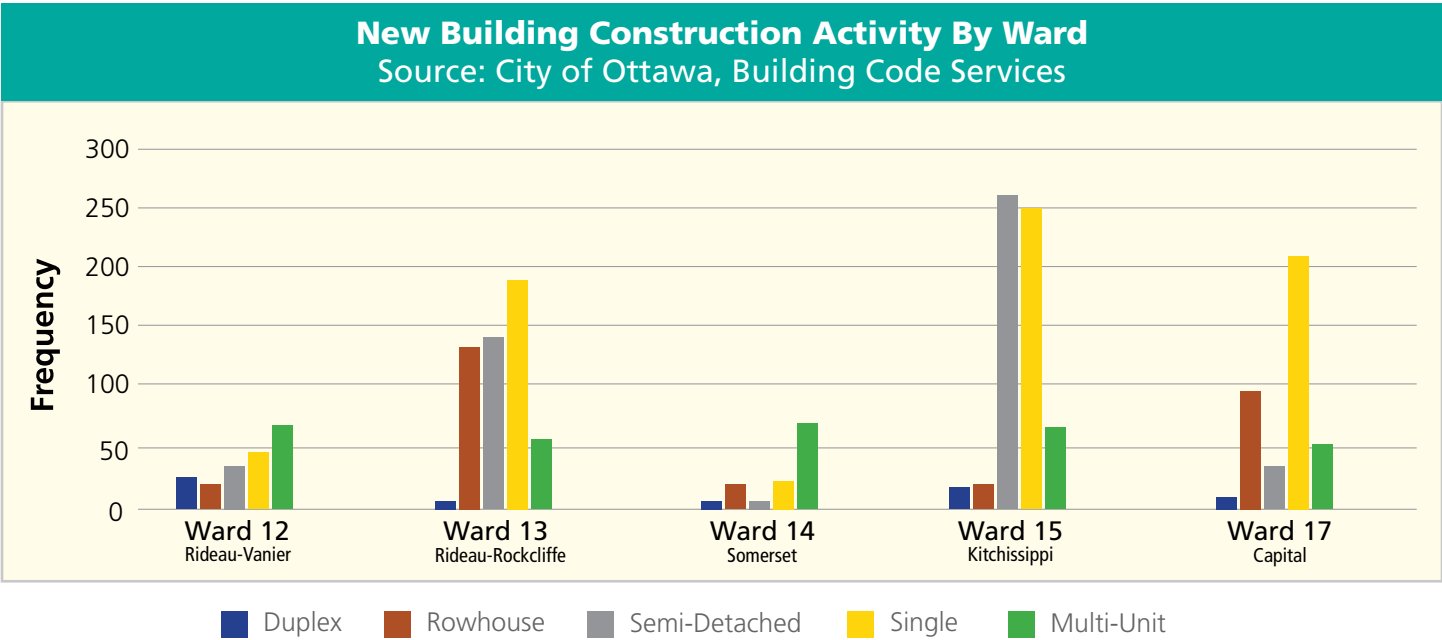
When considering appropriate limits for intensification within Westboro or any neighbourhood, it is necessary to consider their implications on the availability, form, and affordability of new housing supply. Restrictive zoning standards in response to high development pressure within a neighbourhood can lead to unintended consequences. For example, if detached and/or semi-detached dwellings are the only permitted uses, the result may simply be larger detached or semi-detached dwellings that do not adequately address existing character. Although it is prudent to regulate development and infill, overly restrictive requirements do not eliminate the underlying housing demand which drives new development.

Restrictive zoning standards in response to high development pressure within a neighbourhood can lead to unintended consequences.

Development Trends Within and Outside the Study Area

Common forms of intensification within the study area involve the severance of larger lots into smaller lots to permit the creation of multiple buildings, whether they are detached dwellings, semi-detached dwellings, or triplexes.

Based on building permit activity between 2015 and 2018, Kitchissippi Ward (Ward 15) has seen the highest number of building permits issued for new low-rise infill development within the wards located within the Mature Neighbourhoods Overlay.



The above graph shows the volume of new residential construction within the central wards of the City (i.e. the wards that are part of the Mature Neighbourhoods Overlay). Note that "multi-unit" construction includes triplexes, low-rise apartments, high-rise apartments, and stacked townhouses.

The below table illustrates the overall size of approved infill construction in Kitchissippi Ward as a whole, by measuring the floor area of each approved permit. In general, the majority of new infill construction ranges between 300 and 600 sq m in total floor area, including in all but one of the constructed triplexes.

Size of buildings by dwelling type - Ward 15	<300	301-400	401-500	501-600	>600	% over 500 sq m
Detached	62	52	24	10	0	6.76%
Semi-Detached	11	68	87	54	17	29.96%
Long Semi-Detached	2	15	2	0	0	0.00%
Duplex	8	0	1	0	0	0.00%
Triplex	7	11	10	14	1	34.88%

The above chart illustrates the size of infill buildings by total floor area in square metres, throughout the entirety of Kitchissippi Ward.



Within the study area specifically, infill once again consists of mainly detached and semi-detached dwellings with some three-unit dwellings. While three-unit dwellings form only 16% of construction within the study area between 2015 and 2018, most of these were constructed in 2017 and 2018, suggesting a potential trend in demand towards this form of housing.

When examining the permitted floor areas of approved low-rise infill construction within the study area, it is found that, contrary to what is seen at the ward level, triplexes comprise the majority of infills that are above 500 square metres in floor area.

Size of buildings by dwelling type - Ward 15	<300	301-400	401-500	501-600	>600	% over 500 sq m
Detached	9	14	7	0	0	0.00%
Semi-Detached	2	14	16	4	0	11.11%
Duplex	1	0	0	0	0	0.00%
Triplex	0	0	3	10	0	76.92%

The above chart illustrates the size of infill buildings by total floor area in square metres, throughout the study area only.

This suggests that triplexes and other multi-unit developments may have a more noticeable visual impact on the character of the neighbourhood – particularly those that are built with the intent of converting to a low-rise apartment at some point in the future, as has been the case with some triplexes. However, they only form a fraction of the infill within both Westboro as well as Kitchissippi Ward as a whole.

What is the limit of acceptable intensification in Westboro?

In establishing the Interim Control By-law, one of the goals of this study is to determine the level of infill development that is appropriate for the neighbourhood.

An important part of this discussion is to consider the rate at which Westboro’s residential neighbourhoods are presently being redeveloped. On a lot-by-lot basis, this “rate of change” can be determined based on how many lots in the neighbourhood are redeveloped each year. The following chart shows this calculation, and results in a yearly rate of change based on the development that has occurred within the last four years, from 2015 to 2018.

We focus on infill occurring in this date range specifically, as the zoning by-law changed significantly in 2015 through passage of the Infill 1 and Infill 2 regulations affecting infill and intensification in Westboro and throughout the inner urban area.

Infill Rate of Change - Study Area

Year	Permits	Turnover	Years
2015	22	1.55%	65
2016	23	1.62%	62
2017	20	1.41%	71
2018	15	1.06%	95
Average	20	1.41%	71

Infill Rate of Change - Mature Neighbourhoods

Year	Permits	Turnover	Years
2015	181	0.68%	147
2016	144	0.54%	184
2017	173	0.65%	154
2018	130	0.49%	204
Average	157	0.59%	169

The above tables note the rate of redevelopment within the Westboro study area (1st table) and the Mature Neighbourhoods as a whole (2nd table), based on the number of building permits for new infill each year. The “years” column denotes how many years it would take for the entire neighbourhood to be redeveloped, assuming rate of change remains as-is.

If every lot within the study area were redeveloped at the present rate of turnover, this would mean that it would take slightly over 70 years for the entire neighbourhood to be redeveloped, compared with an average rate of approximately 170 years for the City’s “mature neighbourhoods” as a whole.

With this, and the above policy and statistics being considered, there are numerous factors that influence the “limit” of a neighbourhood’s development. If any of these factors are changed, such as a decrease in the demand for on-site parking, such can affect how many units a site or a neighbourhood can support.



ISSUES

The below list of issues are intended to highlight some of these factors for discussion. Each issue identified is followed by one or two discussion questions, to help facilitate discussion on these topics.

General issues of development in Westboro

Much of the development that takes place in Westboro involves Minor Variances from the Zoning By-law.

From 2015 through 2018, 70% of new low-rise construction within the study area has been subject to a Minor Variance application. In addition, every three-unit dwelling developed within the study area during this period has involved Minor Variance approval.



Count of Newly-Constructed Infill Buildings Dwelling Type	2015	2016	2017	2018	Grand Total
Duplex	1	0	0	0	1
Semi-Detached	12	10	10	4	36
Single	9	9	8	4	30
Triplex	0	4	2	7	13
Grand Total	22	23	20	15	80

This table shows the total number of infill dwellings constructed within the study area by dwelling type through 2015-2018.

The intent of a Minor Variance process is to address individual or site-specific circumstances, often ones that were not contemplated when the relevant zoning provisions were created, that prevent a property from being developed in such a way as to conform with the By-law. However, the high rate of Minor Variance applications, which are not confined to one specific dwelling type, suggests significant issues present with complying with the zoning requirements as written, and suggests gaps between community expectations and the design of infill that is taking place.

Impacts of development within the neighbourhood on its character

A common concern raised with respect to infill development is its impact on the surrounding character. As such, this study will need to consider what elements of “neighbourhood character” can be assessed within the context of urban infill development, and devise zoning and related policies that may help address these elements.

As zoning regulations primarily control the development permissions on a given property, this paper focuses on physical site elements that may affect this character. Such elements may include, but not necessarily be limited to:

Streetscape character addresses the look and form of buildings from street level. This can be affected by the following:

1. Street/Right of Way (ROW) Treatment – including but not limited to the presence of street trees, sidewalks and pedestrian infrastructure, and landscaping.
2. Front Yard Treatment – pertaining to how individual properties’ front yards are used, which includes elements such as front yard landscaping, the presence and width of pedestrian and/or vehicular access into a building
3. Front Façade Treatment – including the design of the front façade, including building materials, as well as the positioning and location of the principal entranceway into the building, and how parking and garages are positioned.

Past studies have introduced zoning requirements to address some of these elements, most notably the introduction of the Mature Neighbourhoods Overlay regulations, which introduced the requirement for Streetscape Character Analysis in support of any infill development.

Architectural character addresses the design and built form of buildings within the neighbourhood. This may include its materiality, size, or positioning on the lot. While it is not reasonable to expect that new buildings should always be the same as, or even similar to, existing buildings within a neighbourhood as per the Official Plan, the form and design of a site should respond to common elements of the existing built form and address its compatibility in this regard.

Many elements of architectural character, including building materials and similar architectural features, are most directly reviewed through the Site Plan Control approval process. However, most of the dwelling types permitted as-of-right within the R3R zone are of a low enough density to not be subject to this process and are thereby not subject to design review.

These elements of character do not address the uses that take place within the building, although some elements may potentially be driven by the proposed use.

Questions to consider:

What characteristics (including but not limited to the matters above) should we...

- *Preserve?*
- *Aim to minimize or eliminate over time?*
- *Enhance?*
- *Introduce or re-introduce?*

Are there examples of infill that do a good job of complementing or enhancing the neighbourhood's character? How, in your view, did these projects do this?

Are there examples of infill that detract from the neighbourhood's character? How, in your view, did these projects do this?

Affordability of housing within the neighbourhood

The Official Plan encourages a wide range of housing types suitable for various households, regardless of whether such housing is rental housing or owner-occupied.

As noted previously in the report, the vacancy rate within this part of Westboro is below one percent, which suggests a high demand for housing within this area. Such demand has the potential to exacerbate the issue of affordability within the area.

Questions to consider:

Westboro is a neighbourhood that is in close proximity to a variety of services, with parts of the neighbourhood in proximity to rapid transit. With this in mind, how can we ensure a range of housing options that are reasonably affordable to a wide range of Ottawa's population?



Three-unit dwellings in Westboro

Triplexes are generally approved and built on smaller lots than presently required by the R3R zoning, often with additional relief from the zoning as well (e.g. setbacks, amenity area)

The primary type of development of concern within the study area is the severance of existing lots into two lots with the intention of constructing a three-unit dwelling on each newly-created lot. Typically, the lots after severance are not sufficiently sized to meet the lot width and area requirements of the R3R zone (12 m and 360 sq m, respectively). This results in up to six units developed on a parcel that may have been large enough to accommodate no more than two or three units as-of-right.

Despite the above, the R3R zone has the same development standards for three-unit dwellings as it does for detached and semi-detached dwellings; this includes a minimum lot width of 12 m and a minimum lot area of 360 sq m.

In response to the Interim Control By-law, some three-unit dwelling proposals that were in-stream at the time of the By-law's passing have been modified to "long semi-detached dwellings". As the Interim Control By-law specifically acted to prohibit the use of "three-unit dwelling", no other forms of infill were covered in this prohibition.

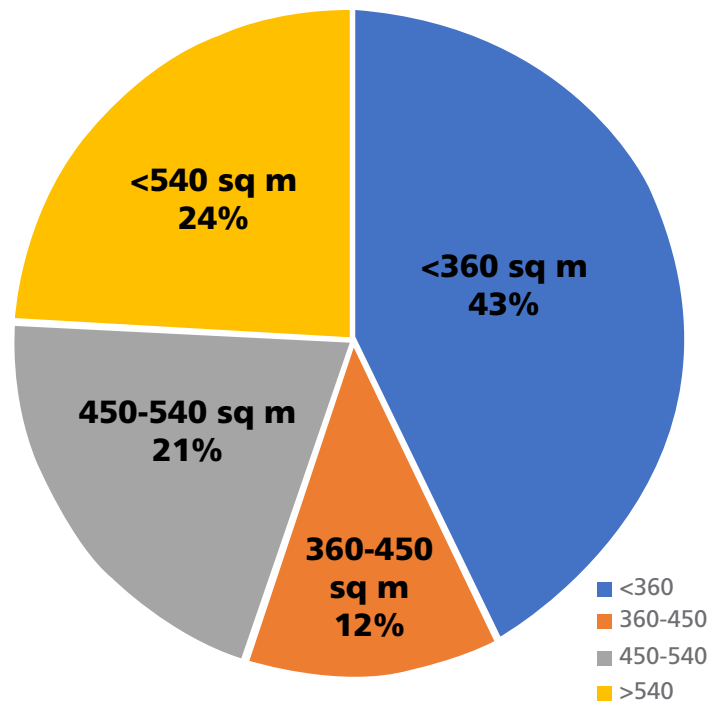


Chart showing the distribution of lot sizes (by area in square metres) within the study area. Over 40% of lots covered within this area are under 360 square metres in size, which is the minimum lot area requirement in the R3R zone.

The above chart illustrates the distribution of lot sizes within the study area. It should be noted that this chart speaks specifically to the lot area, and not to the type of dwelling located on each individual lot. With this in mind, this shows that lot sizes within the study area are quite varied. A significant percentage of lots (43%) are below the 360 sq m lot area required for most uses within the R3R zone. Larger-sized lots, in particular over 540 sq m, comprise roughly one-quarter of the lot fabric. This distribution suggests that the study area's lot size requirements are not necessarily reflective of the existing lot fabric.

Questions to consider:

How can multi-unit dwellings (including triplexes) be designed in such a way as to better reflect and enhance the character of the neighbourhood?

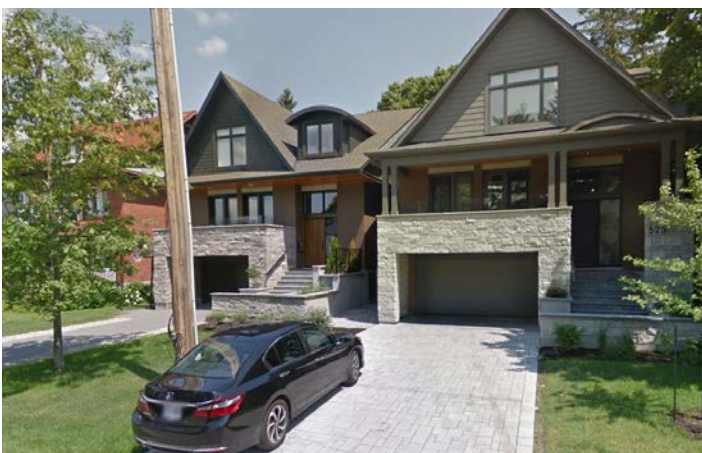
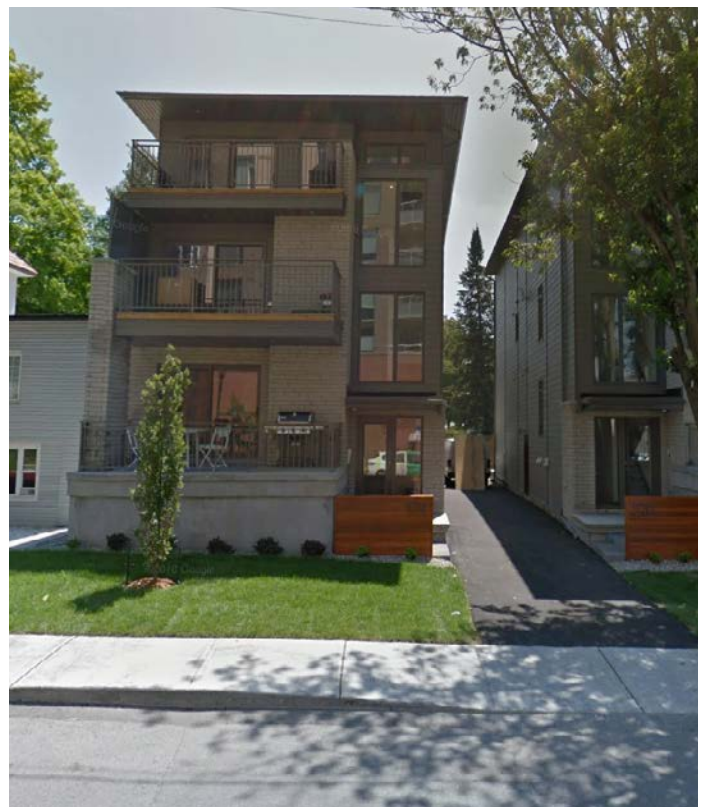
Triplexes are often built with the intention of creating additional units after-the-fact, whether through a Zoning By-law Amendment or illegally without any development approval.

As low-rise apartment dwellings are currently subject to Site Plan Control, but not triplexes, much of the building and site design oversight offered by this process is effectively precluded as a result of the building already being constructed at the time of application. As a result, the effectiveness of this process is severely limited and often does not result in any tangible improvements to the site's overall functionality. It is worth noting that the issue of triplexes being developed with the intent of creating four-unit buildings after the fact is not unique to the study area, and has occurred in various R3 and R4 zoned areas across the City.

Had these developments been subjected to a Site Plan Control review prior to construction, as is intended for low-rise apartments, their entire design could have achieved greater sensitivity to the surrounding character, regardless of the total number of units. Therefore, it can be argued that the crux of the issue is not whether multi-unit buildings are appropriate, but instead how to appropriately address design prior to construction.

Questions to consider:

If a multi-unit dwelling were designed so as to be similar in appearance and configuration to existing adjacent houses, what would be your opinion of the proposal?



SITE DESIGN

The use and function of front and rear yards

Another element relevant to “character” is the use and treatment of yards within a residential lot. Depending on the nature and type of a residential building, these can be used for a variety of functions:

- **recreational purposes** such as patios, pools, or other amenity spaces;
- **aesthetic/environmental purposes** such as for trees and/or greenspace;
- **functional purposes** such as parking and garbage storage.

In the case of many detached, semi-detached, and townhouse dwellings in Westboro, the use of the rear yard is often aesthetic or recreational, with a large amount of space devoted to greenspace, or features such as patios or pools. Some dwellings may have rear yard parking spaces or detached garages, but such features often only take up a fraction of the lot.

The question of parking is a particular point of contention for infill developments in the neighbourhood. On-site parking is not required within the Zoning By-law, however many developments continue to elect to provide parking spaces. Where parking is provided, zoning regulations encourage that it be provided in such a way as to minimize impacts to the streetscape and pedestrian realm. This often results in parking within rear yards, often accessed by shared driveways.

In recent applications to the Committee of Adjustment involving multi-unit dwellings in Westboro, concerns have been expressed with rear

yard parking, citing concerns regarding impact on available landscaping, trees, and privacy for surrounding lots. To this end, it is acknowledged that the creation of multiple rear yard parking spaces can have the effect of reducing space available in the rear yard for landscaping and tree cover, such that it can impact the rear yard pattern.

With this in mind, the use of a property for certain recreational purposes, such as for pools, decks, or patios, can also occupy a certain amount of space that would otherwise be used for soft landscaping or tree cover. Furthermore, there are currently no restrictions on the permitted extent of hard landscaping, pools, decks, patios, or parking provided the drainage by-laws are maintained.

Questions to consider:

Greenspace and trees are often seen as important functions of rear yard space. What do you consider to be other primary functions of rear yard space? How can these functions be achieved while adequately preserving greenspace?

How can the negative impacts of parking be better mitigated for new developments?

Given that automobile use drives demand for on-site parking, how can Westboro transition towards lower automobile use? What impacts can infill have in this transition?



CONCLUSION

Westboro is experiencing a higher rate of change and redevelopment than most of the central neighbourhoods of the City. While the rate of change within residential neighbourhoods is generally more gradual than rapid, the development that has taken place within Westboro is often considered a source of disruption and frustration. The type of development that has occurred within Westboro has created significant uncertainty about infill within the area, particularly given the amount of infill that is beyond present zoning permissions and has been subject to Minor Variance approval.

The issues identified in this paper are not intended to be an exhaustive list. Ultimately, this is an opportunity to create a coherent vision for the growth and development of the neighbourhood. With this in mind, we would like to hear more about what you think about infill development in Westboro, and everything that you love about the neighbourhood.

Please feel free to provide your comments to us by Friday, October 18th.

Comments

To provide your comments and/or add yourself to our notification list for future updates, please contact:

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