

Minutes

**Toronto Society of Architects
October Meeting**
15 October, 2008 – 6:30pm to 8:30 pm
Harbourfront Centre, 235 Queens Quay West

Present:

Agnieszka Wloch
Antonio Gómez-Palacio
Bindya Lad
Brad Collard

Carina Cojeen
Carla Munoz
Corwin Cambra
Ho Sung

Medhat Soliman Rofael
Phil Goodfellow

1. Introduction

- Antonio started the meeting by introducing himself and Phil.
- Phil noted that Corwin and Leo had contacted him to organize a consultation with TSA members at a monthly meeting. Phil advised that the City was proposing to amend the Official Plan (OP) to incorporate additional Site Plan Control provisions.
- Phil advised that the TSA holds meetings on the first Tuesday of every month; meeting formats take the form of group discussions or special events. He noted that the next meeting will be the launch of the *Unbuilt Toronto* book and exhibit. Phil shared that a call for submissions was sent out by the TSA for designers to submit unbuilt projects to be included in the exhibition. The event will be held at the ROM, with the exhibit remaining on display until January.

2. Site Plan Control, proposed amendments, City of Toronto

- Phil introduced Corwin Cambray, Senior Planner, and Leo Desorcy, Program Manager, from the Planning Division at the City of Toronto.
- Corwin noted that he had brought various handouts which included:
 - the Staff Report outlining the proposed amendments that was submitted to the Planning and Growth Management Committee on June 16, 2008 [Attachment A];
 - existing Official Plan Excerpts that are to be amended [Attachment B]; and,
 - Comment sheets [Attachment C].
- Corwin advised that the amendments to the Official Plan were supported by new provincial powers for Site Plan Control transferred from Planning Act (s.41) to City of Toronto Act (s.114) in January 2007.

- Leo advised that a number of buildings such as houses and school portables are exempt from Site Plan Control.
- Corwin noted that Site Plan Approval is a nine month process, which allows all agencies at the City to ensure conformity of a proposal to regulations and to provide comments.
- Leo noted that the proposed amendments will require facilities for people with disabilities. He shared that the Planning Division will be interested in the location of ramps and how they relate to the development. These types of items will be secured as conditions in a Site Plan Agreement.
- Amended policies in the Official Plan will lead to new provisions in the Site Plan Control bylaw. The proposed amendments will give the Planning Division the ability to regulate exterior design features and sustainable elements.
- Corwin noted that a final report will be presented to Council in the New Year.
- Leo noted that the draft Official Plan Amendment (OPA) contains new policies relating to:
 - the Design Review Panel;
 - Exterior design;
 - Sustainable design elements; and,
 - Accessibility for persons with disability.
- The proposed OPA is included as Attachment in the Report [Attachment A].
- Corwin and Leo presented the proposed amendments to the Official Plan policies, which are outlined in Attachment A. A discussion period followed the presentation in which the following issues were raised.

Design Review Panel (DRP):

- Leo advised that the DRP was a two-year pilot project. The City publishes the minutes of the DRP, and the advice of the panel is absorbed and given to the Planning Department. Projects in selected pilot areas (i.e., North York Centre, Fort York, St. Lawrence, King-Parliament, Scarborough City Centre, Etobicoke Centre, and Humber Bay Shores) were encouraged to present to DRP; these pilot areas have now been developed.
- Leo noted that the DRP has been well received, and the City is looking at expanding areas and panels.
- Antonio noted that the proposed change is excellent, and suggested that wording preceding the policy use the word “are” rather than “will”.
- Corwin advised that the word “will” has a certain interpretation in the OP. Interpretation clauses are included in the back of the OP document.
- Antonio noted that the current DRP is a pilot project, and it is a success, the City if adopting it as a viable tool. He questioned whether the advisory role of the DRP is changing according to the amended policy.

- Corwin advised that the role of the DRP is not changing. He noted that the DRP makes recommendations, which are included in the Planning Department Report submitted to Council who are responsible for making the final decision.
- Leo shared that the DRP has been a community outreach tool and so far no developer has refused to go to the panel. He noted that the amended OP policy would provide another device in the toolkit for the municipality to use in the process of development review.
- PG: community process become more aware – point of changes

Exterior Design:

- Leo noted that the City is trying to incorporate planning interests in the exterior design of buildings.
- Antonio noted that the inclusion of certain words in the proposed amendments could be problematic to *Chapter 3, Section 3.1.2. Built Form, policy 3, sidebar*. He advised that the current text suggests that new buildings should mimic the style of adjacent buildings. Antonio suggested that the word ‘proportion’ be added to the first paragraph where composition and pattern are mentioned.
- Carla advised that the text was too prescriptive, and limited in the creating of City. She suggested that it would be better to describe concepts rather than details.
- Leo advised that the last sentence of the first paragraph would be modified as concerns were expressed.
- Official Plan gives City strength of power, give strength to other groups, buildings reflection of time, no expectation to mimic style
- Phil noted that the interior arrangement on floors adjacent to the pedestrian environment could present potential conflicts between exterior façade massing.
- Phil noted that exterior design is important when trying to ‘fit’ a large building into a smaller-scaled residential neighbourhood.
- Corwin noted that the neighbourhoods and communities are interested in exterior design.
- Leo noted that images would also be included in the sidebars, as they do a better job than words. The National Ballet School was suggested as a successful example as it is a project that creates harmony amongst multiple buildings.
- Medhat noted that in Barcelona there is a better harmony between buildings. He questioned why we do not achieve such harmony in Toronto. He questioned what types of documents are used in Barcelona to guide development.
- Leo noted that in Barcelona, the process is run by architects and designers, while in Toronto, it is run by lawyers. Consequently, the lawyers require text that guides them.
- Antonio added that Barcelona has a very prescriptive design review process, which includes peer review.

Sustainable Elements:

- Leo noted that the proposed amendments deal with sustainable design elements, located within the right-of-way (ROW).
- Corwin advised that the Planning Division was seeking to expanding SPC, to include where barrier free access is sited on a property and how buildings relate to their surroundings. This includes improvements adjacent to the public boulevard.
- It was questioned whether sustainable design materials were defined.
- Corwin noted two new sidebars are being added to the SPC section. He advised that a sustainable design green development sidebar will reference the green development standards. Corwin noted that the GDS sidebar acts as an implementation aid.
- Phil acknowledged that the new sidebar allows the GDS to be folded into the OP, which gives the GDS legitimacy.
- Antonio noted that the GDS should also mention the neighbourhood.

Approval Timelines:

- Phil noted that the current site plan approval process is a nine (9) month approval, and with more elements being added the process is likely going to be extended to twelve (12) months as more material is required. He suggested that a checklist be created to help streamline process.
- Antonio added that specifications should be set for milestones in the process and the associated requirements as a design is still evolving during the approval process. For example, materials could be down at the elevation design stage
- Corwin noted that SPA conditions could help streamline the process, requiring applicants to submit certain requirements, prior to the issuance of various permits.
- It was noted that applicants should start thinking about things earlier on in the process.
- The value of certain items was discussed. Agnieszka noted that LEED registration is a matter of filling out a form and submitting funds, but not everyone does it.
- Antonio suggested that certain elements should be made mandatory such as requiring that all windows be operable, to streamline the design process.
- Corwin noted that the current approvals system uses processes of negotiation; however, if it is standardized barriers can be removed.

- It was suggested that the sidebar addition to *Chapter 5, Section 5.1.3.1, Site Plan Control* should include more bullets that speak to larger site, the recycling materials, etc.

Conclusion:

- Antonio noted that it was 8:45 pm and the meeting should be wrapped up.
- Corwin advised that a report would be presented to the Planning Growth Committee in January 2009. He encouraged everyone to review the proposed amendments and provide their comments on the sheets provided, and to get their names added to the mailing list to get further notice about the amendments.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:55 pm.

The next TSA General Meeting will take place on Tuesday November 4th, 2008, at 6:30 pm, at the Royal Ontario Museum.