



April 24, 2017

Mayor Jim Watson
City of Ottawa
Email: jim.watson@ottawa.ca

Dear Mayor Watson,

Re: 890/900 Bank Street rezoning proposal - April 26th City Council agenda item

In 2011, the 8 storey buildings proposed as part of Lansdowne facing Holmwood Avenue and Bank Street were reduced to 5 storeys after a successful Ontario Municipal Board appeal because they did not make for effective “building transition”.

As the Mayor, you wrote afterwards, “I am very proud to be the Mayor of a City in which such a compromise can be found by citizens working together. You and your neighbours have created...a turning point in the City’s working relationship with the neighbouring community”.

So after the divisiveness of Lansdowne, the Glebe Community Association (GCA) very intentionally set out to reset the relationship with the City and developers and to adjust the narrative that we are all too aware of – the Glebe is full of NIMBYs who complain about development.

We have been working constructively to develop solutions to development issues and the needs of the community. In recent years, we have helped move forward significant proposals on Bank Street, Queen Elizabeth Drive, and Bronson Avenue – to promote development that “fits in and works well” with the character of the established, low-rise neighbourhood, while promoting intensification and achievement of the City’s Official Plan (OP).

The City told us not to expect a Secondary Plan (SP) for the neighbourhood (intended to tailor City policies to local circumstances) - there “wasn’t much opportunity for development on Bank Street” so it was not a priority. So we launched **ImagineGlebe** - a Vision for Bank Street, and were encouraged by having you join us at our kick-off event. Supported by over 900 Glebe residents and visitors, the vision calls for development that reflects the heritage and established low-rise neighbourhood character of the street.

The 8 storey Beer Store proposal at 890/900 Bank Street that will go to full City Council this week was officially submitted last August. We have met frequently with the developer to review plans, provide feedback, and share **ImagineGlebe** results. 4 storeys was fine (current zoning by-law is 4 storeys), 6 storeys with meaningful building setbacks/stepbacks could work (6 storeys is the default Traditional Mainstreet zoning height), but 8 storeys didn’t respect the existing neighbourhood character. Two public meetings confirmed these concerns and over 600 people signed a petition.



Figure 1: Looking east at Monk Street

What is the City's vision? With no SP, it's not clear. If the City wants to allow additional height and massing that is a departure from Traditional Mainstreet zoning, we think this should be determined through a robust planning process before this request for additional height is approved.

Apparently City Council agrees. The latest OP (still under appeal...) says:

This {Official} Plan supports mid-rise building heights up to six storeys on Traditional Mainstreets unless a Secondary Plan states otherwise.

Why would the City completely ignore this direction by approving 8 storeys? Why were the amendments we proposed to make this project work refused by Planning Committee?

We were advised there is no current policy basis for refusing the request for additional height and supporting our amendments. But as a matter of policy, a proposal must meet one of 5 subjective conditions for greater height to be considered. It must also comply with all other policies in the OP, including compatibility, urban design, respect for neighbourhood character, etc. The City stated that this project met two of the five conditions:

- The building has access to an arterial road
- A built form transition can be considered appropriate

But the first condition was not even correctly stated. It actually reads: "The proposal is in an area characterised by taller buildings on an arterial road". Why did the City exclude this critical aspect of the condition? Perhaps because stating it correctly highlighted an obvious contradiction - as in the very next sentence it is described as an area "characterised by a lower built form".

The problem is also that when Lansdowne was proposed, concerns were raised that a precedent would be set by the taller buildings (i.e. the "Vibe" condo at Lansdowne combined with the Lord Lansdowne residence). Both buildings are located at what the City refers to as "gateway" locations that can support additional height. The City's response: 'No. All development proposals will be considered on their own merit taking into account relevant policies..'. It turns out that this response was completely disingenuous as the two gateway buildings are all that is needed to meet the condition for additional height here. If the City's interpretation of what constitutes "an area characterised by taller buildings" stands, it makes the 6 storey height limit on Traditional Mainstreets meaningless.

Regarding "building transition", 8 storeys or even 6 storeys this close to 2 storey homes does not make for "building transition". A 1 m building setback (on the northern portion) along Bank Street does not make for a pedestrian-friendly "podium" effect.

The GCA proposed reasonable amendments that are no different from the types found in recent Secondary Plans including Stittsville (4 storey cap on the Traditional Mainstreet) and Centretown (5 storey cap on Elgin Street) even if members of Planning Committee have chosen to ignore this. The City has room within its policy to reconsider the amendments and we ask for your office's support in doing so. Alternatively, a moratorium on additional height/massing on Bank Street's Traditional Mainstreet until such time as either a Secondary Plan is in place or OPA 150 becomes effective would be appropriate.

Regards,



Carolyn Mackenzie
Planning Committee Chair
Glebe Community Association