



COMMUNITY DESIGN ADVISORY COMMITTEE
June 13, 2018
MINUTES

PRESENT: Fred Morley, Chair
William Book
Christopher Daly
Dale Godsoe
Jenna Khoury
Reg Manzer
Rima Thomeh
Deputy Mayor Wayne Mason
Councillor Sam Austin
Councillor Shawn Cleary
Councillor Lindell Smith
Councillor Richard Zurawski

REGRETS: Gaynor Watson-Creed, Vice Chair
Eric Burchill

STAFF: Carl Purvis, Planning Applications Program Manager
Jacob Ritchie, Urban Design Program Manager
Simon Ross-Siegel, Legislative Assistant

The following does not represent a verbatim record of the proceedings of this meeting.

The agenda, reports, supporting documents, and information items circulated are online at halifax.ca.

The meeting was called to order at 11:38 a.m., and the Committee adjourned at 1:33 p.m.

1. CALL TO ORDER

The Chair called the special meeting to order at 11:38 a.m.

2. APPROVAL OF MINUTES – NONE

3. APPROVAL OF THE ORDER OF BUSINESS AND APPROVAL OF ADDITIONS AND DELETIONS

The agenda was accepted as distributed.

4. BUSINESS ARISING OUT OF THE MINUTES – NONE

5. CALL FOR DECLARATION OF CONFLICT OF INTERESTS – NONE

6. CONSIDERATION OF DEFERRED BUSINESS – NONE

7. CORRESPONDENCE, PETITIONS & DELEGATIONS – NONE

8. REPORTS

8.1 STAFF

8.1.1 Review – Comments and input received on the Center Plan

The following was before the Community Design Advisory Committee:

- A staff review and consolidated table of public comments on planning documents, and five attachments
- A staff presentation on Review and Feedback to “Package A” of the Centre Plan
- A hand-out displaying public-opinion research survey results regarding the visual appeal of buildings
- A staff presentation “Halifax/Dartmouth Tour” dated April 25, 2018

Adding to comments previously made at the June 6th meeting of the Committee, Chair Fred Morley expressed that should members of the Committee have any thoughts or comments after the conclusion of today’s meeting which they did not express, all members are encouraged to contact the Chair and the Chair will endeavour to forward these comments to other Committee members and to staff. The Chair also suggested that as those comments arise, the Committee may wish to consider holding an additional meeting to further review these, and also to further consider any topics of discussion for which the Committee does not manage to cover in the present special meeting of the Committee.

Jacob Ritchie, Urban Design Program Manager, resumed the presentation regarding comments and input received on “Package A” of the Centre Plan, the substance of which includes the Secondary Municipal Planning Strategy (SMPS) and the Land Use By-law (LUB).

(4) Built Form - Buildings

Jacob Ritchie reviewed summarized comments and responses relating to the theme of built form for building design. Several commenters had requested, if GFAR is the desired tool to ensure appropriate built form in a zone, to remove height controls because using both is likely to be confusing and overly restrictive. Staff is currently exploring the idea of removing height restrictions in centres and corridors. Several commenters had requested GFAR should be replaced with a net FAR calculation to exclude certain forms of interior uses, particularly where these uses are public amenities. Staff generally prefers GFAR over net FAR. Calculating excluded sections as a part of the net FAR calculation makes it harder for staff to analyse and allows for differing outcomes. As an example of unwanted confusion which could arise from the use of net FAR, two buildings with the same GFAR could have very different net FAR scores. However, staff also expressed that staff recognizes concerns expressed by developers that as buildings become taller, the need for thicker outside structural walls becomes a penalty to developers.

Several commenters had requested that ground floor height allowances should be lowered in the downtown zones. Several commenters had requested variable height mapping for larger sites to enable concentrating height in the centre of the site. Several commenters expressed that viewing triangle requirements cut into buildings and also prioritized cars over pedestrians. Several commenters expressed that lot coverage limits are too restrictive in HR zones.

Several commenters expressed that building typologies do not match recent buildings particularly multi-units in Washmill Lake Court and on the edges of the regional centre, which have been very successful. These commenters suggested buildings in the regional centre should be permitted to build larger floorplates and that 750 square meters is too restrictive. Staff supports building designs which have a tower form or a midrise form, but not both together. Staff is recommending buildings have a mid-rise form up to six stories and beyond this limit, staff recommends a podium and tower form. Staff supports the building of tall towers with narrow dimensions, but also indicated that it becomes challenging for developers to work within these dimensions with limited floorplates. Several Committee members asked if staff could provide some examples of tower dimensions. Staff provided a few examples, including the upper floors of the Trillium building (750 square meters), The Alexander tower (850 square meters), the Vic (780 square meters), Kings Wharf (between 900 and 1,000 square meters), the Roy (1,300 square meters), Monaghan Square (1,300 square meters), and the Maple (2,030 square meters). The draft of the LUB allows the municipality to modify quantitative details by schedule rather than having to write new schedules. This allows the municipality to make local variations, to further recognize local character and precinct elements without creating new zones or making other major changes to Centre Plan.

Several members asked for clarification regarding how a developer would request a variation under the current draft of the Centre Plan. Staff replied that changes to quantitative elements are intended to make better design, and the approvals process would consult the design manual as a check against bad design. The purpose of the design manual is to define elements in the LUB to provide insight as to where developers can expect variations. By way of example, staff described buildings in Halifax with sloping sites that successfully obtain up to fourteen variations by making those variances against the background of the design manual.

Several members inquired about concerns regarding commercial operators who require large unit footprints and the possibility, if there are too many restrictions on built form through setbacks, of a lack of supply of centrally located compatible commercial space. Staff replied that most large commercial realtors are likely to continue to operate in the downtown zones, and these zones are less restrictive regarding built form and therefore will be more viable to commercial operations. In corridor and centre zones, the Centre Plan provides the ability to build commercial offices, but it is not the plan's overall intention to accommodate large commercial operators in them. It is not staff's current intention to broaden these. Staff also noted that commercial unit demand is largely being met now in the downtown and centre zones and there is surplus commercial office space.

Several members expressed agreement for the general position that in the centre zones it would be valuable to eliminate height requirements. Members expressed that planners can use the design manual and GFAR restrictions to lower the height of proposed developments without an overall height restriction. While some members expressed reservations about the possibility of removing height restrictions in the corridor and in higher order residential zones, there was general support for eliminating height restrictions in the centre zones.

Following some discussion on this item, the Committee proposed and considered a motion to advise eliminating height as a restriction in the CEN-2 zones, and to forward the Committee's advice to the Community Planning and Economic Development Committee. Some members expressed that they would still likely be strongly supportive of height restrictions in the corridors and higher order residential zones. Some members added that if height were used as a restriction in the corridors, it may not be necessary to restrict their GFAR as well. Staff replied that it preferred to keep GFAR in some form, though it suggested by working with developers and proposing creative solutions permitted in the design manual, planning staff could enable developers to realize GFAR within these otherwise restrictive spaces with site appropriate precision. Some members also expressed concern about some centre zones bordering on

residential zones and expressed hope that GFAR and the design manual will be able to appropriately manage these zone transitions. For clarity staff listed the five centre zones and described their boundaries to members.

MOVED by Reg Manzer, seconded by Councillor Shawn Cleary,

THAT the Community Design Advisory Committee recommend to Community Planning and Economic Development Committee that it endorse the adoption of GFAR in substitution of height limits for the Regional Centres in the Cen-2 zones.

MOTION PUT AND PASSED.

Regarding lot coverage, some members asked how staff plans to assess when increasing lot coverage beyond 50% in a development to support viability will be appropriate. Staff has performed a great deal of modeling to better assess the impacts of the current lot coverage restrictions. Staff will consider what will likely happen to the undeveloped land, as well as the granularity of particular areas and how these areas are expected to change. Ritchie, noted that in parts of the Halifax peninsula, buildings on narrower streets were built flush with the property line. Developers will be less likely able to do that under the Centre Plan, but staff wants to ensure that properties can recapture any lost volume. Setbacks and stepbacks will help achieve this.

Several members asked staff where the figure for the 750 square meter floorplate limit was drawn from. Staff replied that it was not based on the built form of existing buildings/proposed buildings but was drawn from best practices from other municipalities. Staff indicated that the limit is intended to support narrow towers which provide developers with the ability to add units and space to the properties while limiting sunlight obstruction. Staff noted it did not want to restrict floorplate dimensions to the point that it was not possible to get more than two units to a single floor, as this would be unviable for development. Furthermore, staff pointed out that the most acclaimed developments on the peninsula have been narrow tower form buildings, particularly the Trillium, the Vic, and the Alexander. Planning staff have recently seen new applications requesting permission to build towers with floorplates closer to the 750 square meter figure. Some have requested more height to accommodate the developers, but staff is insistent that towers must remain narrow. Other members expressed that taller midrise buildings could be more obstructive than narrow towers. Members added that in the corridors, setbacks and stepbacks are likely to be more effective tools to ensure access to sunlight, in particular where streets may narrow and widen to major intersections. Members also added that in many zones, concerns about height and density may be mitigated by assurances that the design manual will ensure permeability and pedestrian oriented commercial space.

Several members asked staff what city sources staff had drawn from to develop the Centre Plan Package A draft, particularly those used to address questions around built form. Staff replied that staff had drawn from studies in Calgary and Toronto for the tall building standards. Staff noted that not many similarly sized cities have similar levels of granularity in their LUBs to draw from, and that this feature was a unique feature to the municipality that was noted by participants to the Federation of Canadian Municipalities 2018 conference.

When asked by some members for some visual examples of a GFAR of 3.5 in practice, Jacob Ritchie guided the Committee through a Halifax/Dartmouth virtual tour presentation previously presented by staff at the April 25, 2018 meeting of the Committee. This presentation included photographs of ten buildings and building designs in the municipality and details pertaining to their GFARs.

In response to questions from members about what process a developer may seek for a building design with a greater GFAR than the zone permits, staff expressed that staff would like to have a firm GFAR limit. This would not enable a developer to build a non-compliant property without seeking a plan amendment. Staff noted that this would be similar to the old system except that pre-bonus and post-bonus height would be replaced with pre-bonus and post-bonus GFAR.

Some members referred to concerns that by discussing built form as it relates to individual buildings and adjacent parcels, the Centre Plan may fail to address its vision of complete communities. Staff replied the Centre Plan manages in its current draft to support the vision of complete communities by liberalizing land uses. Staff also intends to further support complete communities by reviewing work done in 2016 and adding details regarding precinct distinctions.

Members responded to comments regarding viewing triangles pointing out that if the Integrated Mobility Plan (IMP) is likely to suggest the removal of slip lanes, the Centre Plan should consider adopting design policies which support this objective. Currently there are large intersections with slip lanes in some places where pedestrians are crowded off triangular islands into the slip lanes. When thinking about how cars interact with the environment and pedestrians, resolutions where developers and pedestrians win are probably good for everyone.

Some members inquired how the Centre Plan relates to stormwater management and noted that it would be a benefit to reward developers with incentives for developing sites that have good water permeability. Members also asked if lot coverage restrictions were highly related to this objective. Staff replied that Halifax Water does have a variable fee structure intended to reward a building's performance. While both lot coverage restrictions and lower parking requirements are intended to help facilitate stormwater management, neither alone prevents a developer from covering portions of a development with impermeable surfaces.

Regarding cantilevers, staff is currently redrafting the design manual to restrict developers from being able to build cantilevers back over street walls. Cantilevers, like setbacks, are structurally challenging and costly to developers and the intent of the design manual is to make development easier.

(5) Built Form – Site Design

Jacob Ritchie reviewed summarized comments and responses relating to the theme of built form as it related to site design. Several commenters had requested that amenity spaces be targeted to plan goals rather than market driven. Ritchie advised that staff has no plans to make this change. Several commenters had noted that sloping sites are difficult to compare with level sites regarding the application of building standards. In reply, staff clarified the LUBs and the Design Manual allow flexibility and variation to address these differences, however edits can be made going forward as they are tested on sloping sites.

Many comments related to site design related to parking requirements. Several commenters had expressed that development in the corridors will be challenging for off-street loading because of the small lot sizes. Staff replied that staff is considering changes to the corridors based on earlier discussion regarding this issue. Currently, staff understands that the right of way will be used to accommodate changes in loading traffic. Several commenters had requested lowering parking requirements in low density residential buildings, whereas other commenters had expressed that parking minimums may push parking into residential side-streets. Staff stated that parking requirements for low density multi-unit buildings will likely be adjusted to match their designation. Furthermore, staff pointed out that lower parking requirements are a key part of plans to improve the affordability of new development in the regional centre. Several commenters had expressed that parking requirements for heritage buildings would deter redevelopment. Staff is looking at adjusting these requirements.

Some members referred to walkable communities as a goal of the Centre Plan. Staff and Committee should avoid providing parking spaces in certain areas of the regional centres which may encourage car use where it is not appropriate. Instead, the Centre Plan should be encouraging walking and transit access to the downtown and centres. Other members agreed but stated that parking requirements may be appropriate in some areas so long as the plan is carefully drafted to distinguish them.

Committee members further discussed issues regarding minimal parking requirements in the corridors and streetside loading. Staff indicated that there is a possibility for real conflict on this item. Currently the plan sets minimal parking requirements for corridor zone properties with small lot sizes. These

circumstances will likely make it unlikely these properties will be serviced by onsite loading, and more likely they will be serviced by sidestreet loading. Some developers have suggested in the alternative that staff zone more nearby residential lots as parts of the corridor. This option would also likely raise controversy and conflict.

Several members reflected that measures under the Centre Plan intended to increase density and improve affordability and complete communities will, as a consequence of success, mean a reduction in the availability of streetside parking and also increases in street use and activity. Members expressed that this is an expected result and members should be ready to defend the plan and educate the public regarding these outcomes. Several members added that policies from other regional plans such as the IMP will likely encroach on street parking, such as the municipality deciding to install dedicated bus lanes on major routes in the centres or corridors. Some members expressed that while they believe increased density will help generate demand for business and fill currently vacant commercial space, it is still important to recognize that not everyone lives downtown, and many will have to drive into the downtown to access businesses and services located in these zones. Other members expressed that transit policies awaiting fuller development in the IMP will likely help address this particular challenge. Other members noted that a complicating factor is that density is dynamic, meaning the density of where people live and where they travel to will fluctuate greatly during the day. Other members added that it was also important for the Committee to recognize that for some persons with accessibility challenges, driving and parking will continue to be important to ensuring their access to services and places to live.

(7) Land use

Staff and the Chair proposed to move to discuss themes related to land use and reserve the Committee's discussion of density bonusing for a further meeting of the Committee. Jacob Ritchie reviewed summarized comments and responses relating to the theme of land use under Package A of the Centre Plan. Staff suggested that it was a sign of confidence in staff's vision that there were comparably very few comments relating to land use under the draft Centre Plan Package A.

Several commenters had suggested that land use allowances are too permissive in the CEN-1 zone, particularly in areas abutting nearby established residential areas. Staff plans to re-assess the permitted uses in each zone and designation. Several commenters had requested staff restrict stand-alone commercial buildings in the higher residential zones, and limit the percent of commercial use allowable in these zones. Several commenters had requested staff allow for commercial and employment use in the future grown nodes on an interim basis. Several commenters had requested urban agriculture permissions be expanded to permit more than one bee hive, and also to permit chickens in the Package A areas. Staff is considering allowing up to two hives in certain zones and will review other urban agriculture regulations. Several commenters had requested the Centre Plan be drafted to restrict food deserts and food swamps. Staff noted that while staff can restrict drive-throughs there is no capacity to regulate "healthy food retail" within the LUB. However, the Centre Plan attempts to permit a wide range of commercial and grocery stores to support local food security. Several commenters had requested the Centre Plan be drafted to allow butcher shops as part of whole-sale food production and to ensure a broad definition of farmers markets. Several commenters had requested staff expand the definition of local commercial to include more local uses. Several commenters had expressed concern about the use of the term supportive housing in the Centre Plan since discussing the term in the context of a land use discussion is likely to stigmatize persons. A review of senior/shared housing is being completed and can be incorporated into the Centre Plan.

A member strongly suggested that shelters, daycares, assisted and seniors living should be permitted land uses by-right in all zones, and expressed that this is important for creating complete communities. There was general support from the Committee.

Following a further discussion, Committee proposed to adjourn and return for a further meeting to discuss the outstanding items of (6) Density Bonusing, (8) Development Review Process, (9) Implementation, and (10) Other Issues.

9. DATE OF NEXT MEETING –June 27, 2018

10. ADJOURNMENT

The meeting adjourned at 1:33 p.m.

Simon Ross-Siegel
Legislative Assistant