

Hope for Toronto's *Avenues*:

What City of Toronto Planners and Policy-Makers
can do to make the *Avenues* policies more
effective, efficient, consistent and accountable

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Executive Summary

Intensification along main streets is not a new idea, in Toronto or elsewhere. The policy vision of this redevelopment in Toronto since the late 1980s has been of mid-rise, mixed use buildings which will accommodate residential and employment growth. Despite several creative and well-researched plans, this policy vision of redevelopment is lagging in implementation. What else can City Planners and policy-makers do to get major streets in Toronto redeveloped where opportunities arise?

The City of Toronto is firmly committed in its new Official Plan to situating the majority of population growth along the major transportation corridors in the City. These major streets have been renamed the *Avenues* in the amalgamated City's policies. Encouraging reurbanization along the *Avenues* is presented as an efficiency as well as place-affirming strategy: get better use out of existing infrastructure while generating more life and pedestrian culture on major streets.

Through a review of provincial and municipal main streets policies, an academic literature search, key informant interviews, and case studies, I identified several gaps in Toronto's *Avenues* policies which limit their utility. The fundamental challenge to *Avenue* redevelopment stems from the unacknowledged fact that Toronto really has two types of *Avenues*, but a supportable strategy for only one of these typologies. The first, the former main streets, is well supported by contextual research and a Main Streets By-law, but has limited opportunity to accommodate significant redevelopment. The second, comprised of the major streets in the outer amalgamated City, has many more perceived opportunities for redevelopment, but minimal contextual research and policy structure to shape this potential.

While supportive research and zoning updates to shape development form on these outer *Avenues* is slated to come through the *Avenue* Study process, that process is fraught with challenges. It is too slow, and too prone to interference by policy, political, economic and communications issues. Some of these can be traced to deeper policy rationale questions about the presented reasons for preservation of neighbourhoods, infrastructure efficiencies and built form.

To get the *Avenues* process on track, the City needs a dedicated *Avenue* Task force guided by tenured City Policy Staff. The Task Force's mandate must be to create efficiency, continuity and accountability in the *Avenues* agenda. The Task Force should immediately advocate investigation of an outer *Avenues* by-law. The Task Force should also immediately undertake a "Taking Stock" Report, comparing and critiquing *Avenue* Study results to date. This evaluation should be complemented by a deeper *Avenues* policy review, geared to fine-tuning the policies as a part of the broader five year Official Plan review.

Table of Contents

Executive Summary.....	2
Table of Contents.....	3
Introduction	4
Part 1: Main Streets, Corridors and <i>Avenues</i>	6
Planning the <i>Avenues</i>	7
Suggestions.....	8
Moving forward from Main Streets.....	9
Suggestions.....	14
Part 2: The <i>Avenues</i> Ideals.....	15
1. We must be vigilant in protecting stable neighbourhoods.....	15
2. Toronto’s infrastructure is underused.....	16
3. New <i>Avenue</i> buildings should be mid-rise and mixed use	18
Suggestions.....	20
Part 3: Case Studies	21
Approach	22
Cases.....	22
Challenges encountered in case study research.....	27
Summary of Recommendations.....	28
Appendices	30
Appendix 1: City of Toronto Urban Structure Map	30
Appendix 2: Main Streets.....	31
Appendix 3: Mid-rise along the <i>Avenues</i> , 2000-2005	32
Appendix 4: Incremental Change Areas, 2000.....	33
Appendix 5: Case Study Site Statistics.....	34
References.....	40
Interviews	46

Introduction

Change is not by definition good or bad. It can move in either direction. As one participant in a workshop on our City's future put it bluntly, "*Toronto is on the cusp of dramatic change: we're on the verge of getting things right or allowing things to go really wrong.*" (City of Toronto, 2000: 3)

Toronto expects more than half a million new residents by the year 2031 (City of Toronto, June 2006). The policy framework in the City's new Official Plan aims to prepare the City to integrate this growth by creating appealing "dynamic transit oriented mixed use centres and corridors," where residential and employment growth can occur (section 2.1.1). These corridors are Toronto's major streets (see the *Avenues* outlined in the Official Plan Urban Structure Map, in Appendix 1). The Plan introduces new terminology for these corridors, calling them the *Avenues*.

Policy makers in Toronto and elsewhere hold that adding residential and employment capacity along major streets offers many potential benefits: population and employment growth can be accommodated; streets made more lively but not more congested; resources, land and infrastructure used more efficiently; neighbourhood economic conditions improved by the increased diversity of uses and users; all while respecting the character of neighbourhoods so valued by residents.

Encouraging retention of retail strips and mixing uses along main streets is a long-term City of Toronto policy goal, articulated in plans from the 1970s onwards.¹ Development of residential units along main streets is similarly a continuing objective, first articulated in a call to action by then-Councillor Richard Gilbert in 1987.

The City's new *Avenues* policies, in force as of summer 2006 through Toronto Official Plan section 2.2.3, articulate similar (if less specific) aims to Gilbert's earlier vision, yet include a much broader diversity of streetscapes across the amalgamated City. These broad policies are fleshed out by localized consultative *Avenue* Studies, which study small *Avenue* segments' typology, and consult with the community regarding future opportunities for redevelopment. An updated draft zoning by-law for the study area, including "mix of uses, heights, densities, setbacks and other zoning standards" (City of Toronto, June 2006: 2-15), is the end results of these studies.

The City has 160 kilometres of designated *Avenues*, and Studies generally address chunks of approximately one kilometre. Thus far the City has completed eight and has in progress six further *Avenue Studies*, so zoning updates are in-progress or completed for less than ten percent of these streets.

A review of past policies seems prudent as planners and policy-makers move forward with the *Avenues* initiative. What were some of the key challenges which may have restricted developer implementation of the Main Streets initiative? Are there any clarifications to the *Avenues* policies planners and policy-makers could propose at the

¹ See, for example, the 1976 City of Toronto Plan Map, which illustrates a tiered system of commerce areas. Section 3(f) of that Plan, regarding Commerce Areas, encourages the protection of retail strips.

upcoming five-year review of the Official Plan which may resolve some of these challenges? Is there much mid-rise development happening or proposed on Toronto's *Avenues* now, and, if so, what can some of these developments tell us about the effects of the long-term main street revitalization trend in Toronto?

This evaluation addresses these three questions in three parts. The first draws on historic Toronto Plans as well as academic, government and popular literature, and key informant interviews, tracing a brief history of main street revitalization in Toronto, its challenges, and its successes. The second extracts three key ideals of the present City's *Avenues* policies which frequently came up in interviews and City documents: protection of neighbourhoods, infrastructure efficiencies, and improved built form. Assessing these ideals against planning literature and City documentation points out some areas where the *Avenues* policies are poorly supported. Four brief case studies of recent *Avenue* developments, explored through a review of staff reports, Ontario Municipal Board documentation and staff recollections, illustrate some of the *Avenues* policy challenges in the final part. All recommendations generated through this evaluation (marked with arrows throughout the text) are synthesized in the summary of recommendations.

This evaluation fulfills three perceived needs for municipal planning practice in Toronto. First, it takes a pragmatic stance and asks, given the resources at hand, are there ways the City could better defend or make useful its broad *Avenues* policy directives? Recognizing the financial and staffing constraints planning policy-makers face in Toronto, an effort to offer clearer standards – which necessarily underlie the *Avenues* ideal anyway – would provide a better foundation for City staff to rely on when challenged on the *Avenue* ideal's validity and specifics (Bedford, 1998; Seasons, 2003). As Toronto Councillor Stintz said in 2006, “The City needs to define its goal distinctly: just saying they're building a beautiful building is not enough.” Second, this evaluation recommends an organizational strategy for evaluating *Avenue* redevelopment to date and managing it on the remaining as-yet unstudied 90 percent of Toronto's *Avenues*. This strategy promotes continuity, efficiency, and accountability. Finally, by providing a glimpse of procedural and functional processes which influence what gets built along Toronto's *Avenues*, this work offers some insight into why mid-rise building opportunities are capitalized on or missed, and how to conduct a broader assessment of them in future.

Part 1: Main Streets, Corridors and *Avenues*

Enlivening streets is a popular idea. Many cities, regions, states and provinces across North America offer some sort of program or policy to this end.² Yet, as Hess and Milroy point out in their 2006 report *Making Toronto's Streets*, there are two active sets of ideas about how to prioritize street reshaping and uses in Toronto. Are streets movement corridors for traffic? Or are streets “the main public places of a city,” as Jacobs describes, which make or break one’s first impression of that place (1961: 29)?

The City of Toronto’s planning department, as well as the Metro planning department prior to amalgamation, have brought forward planning initiatives since the late 1980s which suggest they prioritize revitalizing streets as places. This is most convincingly articulated in then-Councillor Dr. Richard Gilbert’s 1987 *Proposal to redevelop the main streets of Toronto*. Dr. Gilbert’s proposal called for improvements to both aesthetics and efficiency along Toronto’s streets by referencing familiar European streetscapes juxtaposed with what he observed to be rundown, nondescript Toronto street facades.

Citing a clear vision of beautiful street form first is a tack scholars such as Talen and Ellis (2002), pressing for a resurgence of normative standards in planning, would welcome: readers immediately envision Paris and recognize Dr. Gilbert’s goal. More substantively, Dr. Gilbert then noted Toronto’s housing crisis as a program “stick”, and opportunities to create parking, enhanced commercial activity, and other benefits as program “carrots”. Metro and City Councils, inspired by this proposal, embarked on a joint program to engage citizens, search for ideas, and research the economic viability of intensification along main streets in the former City of Toronto (Hemson Consulting and Baird-Sampson Urban Design, 1989 a and b; Gilbert 1993; Metro Toronto 1989 a, b and c; Bedford, 2006).

The main streets initiative stimulated many policy changes, culminating in amendments to Cityplan By-law 425-93 to introduce main streets zoning provisions through By-law 1994-0178 (zoned main streets are mapped at Appendix 2). This amendment pre-zoned main street sites to allow mid-rise, mixed use development,³ and lessened the parking requirement to reflect a sliding scale by unit size. Yet, despite an inspiring proposal, an eager council, and a positively involved citizen task force (Jane Jacobs herself participated in the Search for Ideas Competition), according to former chief planner Paul Bedford (2006) the Main Streets Program was not embraced by developers. Certainly, as Michael Mizzi, a Planning Manager with the City, commented, we are “not drowning at the moment in these buildings”.

For the City and Metro’s part, authors suggest that, prior to By-law 1994-0178’s amendments, likely the parking requirements were too onerous. Many of the lots slated for redevelopment were also just too small for economically viable redevelopment

² See, for example, the City of Ottawa’s Official Plan section 3.6.3, Boston’s Redevelopment Authority’s Housing on Main Street Community Development Planning Initiative and New York’s Main Street program.

³ Michael Mizzi rightly points out that this main street zoning is still in force in some of the central area and central core restrictive exceptions of the former City of Toronto zoning by-law 438-86

(Farncombe, 1993; Gilbert, 1993: 7; Filion, 1999: 436). As well, while the Main Streets Program's time politically may have come, economically it could not have been worse: in 1992 Canada suffered its worst real estate crash on record, with Toronto hit harder than most cities. The "Let's Move" transit plan, an office construction boom, provincially-funded social housing initiatives and the Main Streets Program all halted during this contraction (Filion 1999).

The Toronto real estate climate and the policies that shape its developments have changed. As well, the political organization of Toronto altered dramatically following its forced 1998 amalgamation with surrounding municipalities (Keil and Young, 2003). Unifying the former City's older, denser and more liberal core with the younger, more dispersed and more conservative neighbours has been a bumpy ride by most accounts.

If many aspects of planning in an amalgamated City have been challenging, main street revitalization in this new context enjoyed new opportunities. The City revised its approach to incremental major street redevelopment to take advantage of its new configuration, as "opportunities for reurbanization through the *Avenues* are greatest in the post-war city" (City of Toronto, June 2006: 2-15) – namely, the former surrounding municipalities (see Appendix 4 for an illustration). These opportunities were summarized in the 2000 Directions Report:

On major arterial *Avenues* and adjacent plazas and malls, new buildings are erected incrementally, gradually changing the character of the street or district over the years. There are many of these areas and they are often underdeveloped, at one or two stories, with vast expanses of front-yard parking. They pose a tremendous opportunity for reurbanization and residential intensification along major transit routes without having a big impact on established residential neighbourhoods. This is especially true on post-war arterial streets where there are more large lots that lend themselves to redevelopment without difficult land assembly (35).

Planning the *Avenues*

The *Avenues*, while not a land use designation, have their own policies in the Plan at section 2.2.3. Following Paul Bedford's often-cited saying, "the Plan is the vision, zoning is the precision," (2006) reurbanization along the *Avenues* is to be "achieved through the preparation of *Avenue* Studies for strategic mixed use segments of the corridors" according to Official Plan policy 2.2.3.1 (City of Toronto, June 2006). The *Avenues* policies thus chart a course for Toronto's major streets, while more precise details of where new housing and job opportunities might be created along these strips is guided first by the land use designations in the Land Use Plan, and second by zoning, reviewed and modified piece by piece over the 160km of Toronto *Avenues* through the *Avenue* Studies.

The City's goal is to have zoning in place for redevelopment prior to intense development pressure (Mihevc, 2006). Planners are thus proceeding as quickly as they can manage at conducting *Avenue* Studies. Each year, several studies are completed, ideally with the *Avenues* chosen "on the basis of their need for improvement and

development trends” and then “‘liberated’ for reurbanization” (City of Toronto, 2000: 35).

To date, fourteen *Avenue* Studies are underway or completed. The first four pilot studies – Bloor-Lansdowne, Finch-Weston, The Queensway and Kingston Road – were completed in 2000 by a common group of consultants and coordinated by the Official Plan Section in the City Planning’s Policy and Research Unit. Subsequent studies, disproportionately located in the City’s West District (see Appendix 3 for all study areas mapped with the exclusion of the most recent, in-progress study on Avenue Road), have been managed individually by different consultant groups and coordinated by the local community planners.

While *Avenue* Studies are “are intended to... create a framework for change which is specifically tailored to the local area,” (City of Toronto, 14 March 2007: 3) trends are apparent.⁴ Urban design consultants consistently envision a mix of uses, greater height and density allowed at major intersections and tapering along *Avenues* which are further from these major nodes, a 45 degree angular plane requirement for new developments to respect existing residential dwellings, and public/pedestrian space improvements including park acquisition or revitalization, streetscape design and landscaping.

Implementing by-laws seem generally to respect these recommendations, although in some cases such as the Bloor West: Mimico Creek to Prince Edward Drive study, Council has added permitted uses of live/work units and townhouses to the generally mid-rise, mixed-use template (City of Toronto, 26 June 2003). These inclusions open the door for a different building typography from that envisioned in the *Avenues* policies and, where built, townhouses especially are generally considered a missed opportunity for redevelopment along the *Avenues* by planners⁵ (Freedman, 29 November 2005; Bedford, 2006; Day, 2006; Mizzi, 2006).

Suggestions

➔ **Whether townhouses and live-work units are generally a desired building typology along the *Avenues* warrants further study.** If townhouses are deemed appropriate in some circumstances, these conditions should be articulated in the *Avenues* policies, similar to the clarification at section 2.2.3.3 regarding development in advance of an *Avenue* study. Townhouses along the *Avenues* should also, where permitted, be governed by distinct design guidelines.

For the purposes of this review, townhouses which occupy a large site in a non-street oriented manner, creating an inward-looking neighbourhood rather than an interactive component of the *Avenue* as a place, are considered missed opportunities. Robert

⁴ The City’s online *Avenue* Study material lags behind actual study completion, and is incomplete, in some cases including only the study, others only a staff report to council, and others still the draft by-law. While this information can be viewed at <http://www.toronto.ca/planning/newtoronto.htm#avenue>, a more comprehensive collection of *Avenue* Study consultant reports, reports to Council and by-laws is being compiled by Louisa Galli, a Planner in the West District.

⁵ See 975 The Queensway and 3078 Lakeshore Boulevard case studies.

Freedman's presentation to the 2005 Mid-rise Symposium suggests another interpretation, namely that townhouses built on prime sites near major transit nodes along the *Avenues* constitute a missed opportunity (29 November 2005).

Anecdotal evidence found in the course of this study suggests that de-emphasizing townhouses is not the approach everywhere: Oakville, Ontario is reurbanizing some mainstreets with stacked, live-work townhouses apparently with success (Day, 2006), and Vancouver has developed a unique building typology that has townhouse design elements defining tall building podiums to animate the streetscape (Macdonald, 2005). For areas with lower land value, street-facing townhouses may indeed be the best alternative for incremental growth. City planners should investigate this further.

Another interesting point about the *Avenue* Study process is that these design guidelines and pre-zoning efforts generally focus on the principal street form – often one to two storey retail strips with some surface parking or plaza developments. Outlier sites – often larger and deeper – are commonly earmarked for further independent study.⁶ A colleague reviewing an earlier draft of this work noted this fact and pointed out that these outlier sites are generally the plum development opportunities. The City's stated intent to get ahead of development may be compromised even by the *Avenue* Study process, which often does not address these unusual sites.

The focus on principal street form is entirely backwards, as much of that form will remain stable: it is the outlier sites that are more likely to redevelop. The City's own policies note that large sites are the prime opportunities for incremental growth (City of Toronto, 2000: 35). **A context-sensitive development vision for large, outlier sites should be a key focus of *Avenue* Studies.**

Moving forward from Main Streets

My discussions with City planners suggest that Dr. Gilbert's observations about the perceived sorry state of Toronto's major streets still holds. *Avenue* sites envisioned for redevelopment were described as "hostile to walk along" (Mizzi, 2006) or occupied at present by "just junk" (Bedford, 2006). Mizzi further noted that a great number of *Avenues* sites are underdeveloped, therefore redevelopment would be beneficial "to inject a population along that strip".

Positively, several of the cited key challenges to implementing the Main Streets Program are relieved in present *Avenue* debates: the real estate market, especially for housing, in Toronto is by all accounts booming. The parking standard was revisited and lowered. Parcels slated for redevelopment are generally larger. Still, policy, politics, economics and communications all present familiar challenges despite the increased opportunities gleaned from including the post-War outer City in the *Avenues* strategy.

⁶ See the College Street, The Queensway and Avenue Road case studies.

Policy


On the *Avenues*, “only the Mixed Use and Employment Areas... are targeted for growth. Some minor infill could also occur in *Apartment Neighbourhoods* along *Avenues*, subject to strict criteria set out in the Plan” (City of Toronto, 16 September 2002: 8). In an attempt to clarify this subtlety, the City tweaked its *Avenues* Policies following the 2002 circulation period for its new Official Plan. Despite this attempt at clarification, some challenges in *Avenues* policy implementation are certainly due to citizens and developers not fully understanding the two-tiered policy structure. All the planners I spoke with agreed education about how the *Avenues* policies operate is a work in progress (Mizzi, 2006; Day, 2006; Bedford, 2006; Anonymous, 2006).

Another point of contention in the Draft Official Plan was how to manage *Avenue* development in advance of an *Avenue* Study (Anonymous, 2006). The revised *Avenue* policy 2.2.3.3, as well as its accompanying sidebar, is the result of lengthy negotiations undertaken while the Plan was before the Ontario Municipal Board. As a result, *Avenue* development where zoning for the proposal is not in place is subject to a process similar in goals and requirements to an *Avenue* Study, but at the proponents’ expense.

Perhaps most importantly, the Official Plan’s lack of performance standards is an in-progress experiment. Councillors Stintz and Mihevc both unhappily cited the absence of pictures or concrete numbers for how *Avenues* should look after redevelopment. There are, in fact, three images of mid-rise buildings alongside the *Avenues* policy section of the Official Plan, each six storeys in height with retail at grade and a close relationship with the street. Still, leaving the “precision” to zoning may not be a workable strategy for politicians, citizens and developers.

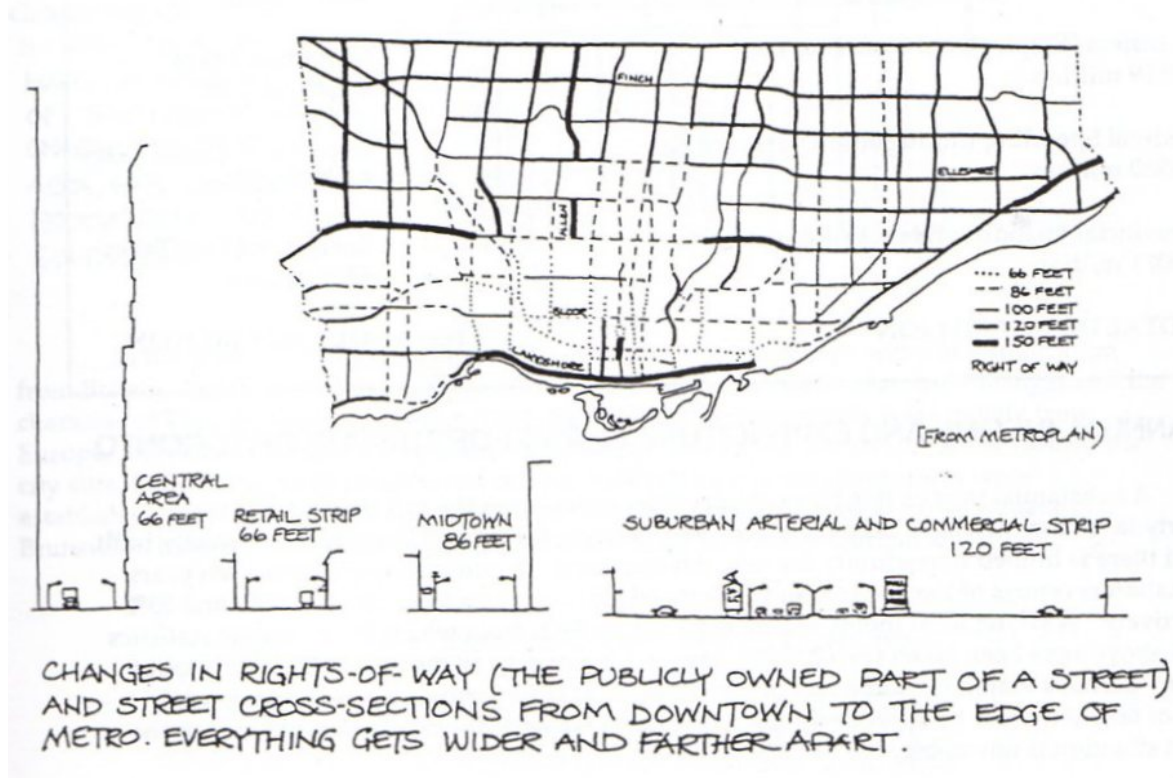
What we do know is that the City’s inability to study every *Avenue* now – at once – is one of the most often-stated weaknesses of the *Avenue* Study process (Anonymous, 2006; Mihevc, 2006). Several reviewers of this work noted in despair that, at the current rate, the City will not complete reviewing the *Avenues* for decades!

Others offered ideas. Michael Mizzi (2007) wondered aloud about the possible impacts if the City were to flip its *Avenues* zoning update approach, passing an *Avenues* zoning by-law on all City *Avenues* similar to Main Streets Zoning By-law 1994-0178, and considering site-specific amendments from *Avenues* zoning as needed. Alternatively, Paul Bedford noted that while a long wait for a zoning update may not be “a danger on a dysfunctional strip, on a hot strip perhaps passing an Interim Control By-law makes sense” (2006). A variation of this same idea was proposed in the recent municipal election by former Mayor and Ward 21 Candidate John Sewell, who suggested an Interim Control By-law be passed on the entire City for developments over 5 storeys, pending further study.

Of these, Mizzi’s idea is most exciting in its progressiveness and simplicity. Like the Main Streets before them, Toronto’s *Avenues* should have an overarching by-law. Yet  **Toronto really has two types of *Avenues*:** the “inner *Avenues*,” on older, former City of Toronto main streets where retail and built form character is largely uniform at two to three storeys; and the “outer *Avenues*,” on former suburban major streets which are generally wider and less dense, built to accommodate significant automobile traffic.

These differences are illustrated by Figure 1, from Edward Relph's May 2002 *Toronto Guide*:

Figure 1: Changes in rights-of-way and comparative street cross-sections



In the former City, the main streets zoning and the studies that supported it should, with minor tweaking, still be quite capable of managing *Avenue* redevelopment (City of Toronto, 6 January 2003: 3-4). This observation is supported by the recently completed College Street *Avenue* Study between Bathurst and Ossington where, following review, the City decided against revising the existing zoning, preferring to consider applications which would not meet those performance standards on a case-by-case basis.

➔ **Broad, context-sensitive research is needed for the former suburban major streets, ideally supporting the passing of an outer *Avenues* zoning by-law.** Along many of the outer *Avenues*, the market is not yet ready to support major redevelopment. This offers planners and policy-makers an opportunity to conduct background studies and revise the *Avenues* vision for a non-main street context.

Politics

The selection of *Avenues* for study is subject to political forces. Planners in the City's Policy and Research Unit note that, initially, political support for *Avenue* Studies from local Councillors was somewhat lacking, as some considered it a process to facilitate unwanted change. Now seemingly that perception has reversed, and some Ward Councillors are maneuvering to gain an *Avenue* Study in an attempt to control growth.

Selection criteria for *Avenue* Studies articulated in a January 6, 2003 Staff Report and adopted by Council on February 4, 2003 are:

- a) presence of vacant and underutilized lands with redevelopment potential
- b) creation of new jobs and housing along transit lines
- c) existing zoning an impediment to area improvement and growth
- d) need for streetscape and pedestrian improvements and scheduling of road reconstruction
- e) market conditions exist for redevelopment
- f) physical infrastructure can accommodate additional growth
- g) community support for an *Avenue* Study
- h) geographic distribution
- i) studies have been done but not implemented
- j) consider existing economic development programs and initiatives⁷

Although not mentioned on this list of selection criteria, interviewees agreed that politics is also an important factor in *Avenue* Study siting (Anonymous, 2006; Bedford, 2006; Mizzi, 2006; Day, 2006; Mihevc, 2006).

Economics

There is some evidence from the 2005 Toronto Mid-rise Symposium that mid-rise can work economically (Kozak, 2005). There are also a number of good examples already built around the amalgamated City (Freedman, November 2005; Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation, February 2004). Yet, a March 14, 2007 City staff report confirms Mizzi's observation that we are not drowning in these buildings.

As Kozak (2005) notes, for developers, profit – “not stealing, just making a living” – is the key consideration. There are valid economic concerns for developers about the mid-rise building form. The Toronto development community notes factors including fragmented lot ownership, marketing challenges and construction costs as deterrents, and thus holds a noticeable preference to build either tall buildings or townhouses (City of Toronto, 14 March 2007). Kozak further supports this position, noting that “residential development involves a number of fixed costs and resources,” such as the need for underground parking, an elevator, a lobby, open space, advertising, and so on; “focusing efforts on projects with bigger profit potential makes good business sense” (Kozak, 2005).

Some help for mid-rise sites may be on the way: the Urban Design Coordinator for the West District of the City of Toronto (who is also co-ordinating the City's *Avenue* Studies), clarifies that tall buildings and mid-rise buildings are two sides of the same coin (2006). The forthcoming tall building growth management strategy is slated to identify sites in Toronto that are suited to accommodate tall buildings. Other sites in growth areas which are not suitable for tall buildings should be considered mid-rise opportunities.

⁷ j) was added by Council on February 4, 2003 as an amendment.

As well, the March 14, 2007 staff report is focused on steps for action to encourage mid-rise buildings along the *Avenues*. Progress to date includes incorporating an award category for the 2007 Toronto Urban Design Awards called “Building in Context: Mid-Rise Buildings in Context”. This is intended to “raise awareness and promote pride in successful mid-rise buildings which exist to date” (6).

City planners are sensitive to the economic impacts of *Avenue* Studies and redevelopment, and favour coupling *Avenue* Studies with other major works projects (Anonymous, 2006). For example, Councillor Mihevc noted that, in his ward, an *Avenue* Study along St. Clair West was a natural choice, considering the major improvements underway through the dedicated right of way installation and the Wychwood Barns project (2006). Ideally, Policy staff suggest the *Avenue* redevelopment process would function through linkages between departments, with the Policy Unit acting as project managers (Anonymous, 2006).

Communication

Despite the well-intentioned policy ideal of mid-rise as a low impact intensification solution, citizens and their Ward Councillors do not always welcome changes. Especially in the former City of Toronto, “there is a high level of consistency in the physical scale and character of these streets. Typically, they are lined with low density, two- to three-storey buildings built to the street edge” (City of Toronto, 1989: 1). Proposals of mid-rise developments in some areas have neighbourhoods and their advocates convinced that the City is “crowding people out of their own neighbourhoods” (Stintz, 2006).

Paul Bedford notes that the greatest challenge of the *Avenues* policies is to engage participants in a discussion, not a dispute (2006). Councillor Stintz for one does not believe this has happened to date, and in fact is not sure what community consultation in *Avenue* Studies is intended to accomplish anyway (2006). I strongly recommend further pursuit of the City’s “Improving the Planning Process” initiative (City of Toronto, 29 September 2005), accompanied by **a broad public participation strategic review**. This review should be guided by procedural justice criteria such as representation, voice, behaviour of the facilitator, meeting logistics, consistency, influence of participants over decisions, and satisfaction with process (Illsley, 2003; Maguire & Lind, 2003, Lauber & Knuth, 1999; Rowe & Frewer, 2000; Arnstein, 1969).

My small sample of interviews does offers some starting points for this review as well, although comprehensive investigation of how public participation could better support the *Avenues* policies is beyond the scope of this report. Staff in the City’s Policy Unit suggest that the community’s role is in helping develop a vision of their changing *Avenue*, but note that participants can be disappointed when development does not precisely reflect that vision. This is a broader challenge with visioning as a public policy tool, and **a re-evaluation of the City’s approach to community visioning should be incorporated in the strategic review**.

Also important, Day (2006) noted that developers do not usually participate in these community visioning exercises. If landowners joined the community in the *Avenue*

visioning process at the outset, and if planners focused on fostering local creativity but not unreasonable expectations, achievable ideas would be more likely to emerge from these meetings.

Suggestions

As Michael Mizzi summarized, redevelopment along Toronto's Main Streets – now *Avenues* – is philosophically the right thing to do, but the City needs to evaluate the take-up (2006). There are some indications that the Chief Planner is considering a dedicated *Avenue* Study team, drawn from a recent Canadian Urban Institute Breakfast speech. Mr. Tyndorf is quoted as saying that such key planning initiatives as *Avenue* Studies warrant a dedicated team, and should not be carried out in the “leftover bits of time overloaded planners can provide” (Novae Res Urbis, 2007: 2). As well, the March 14, 2007 City Staff Report recommends the Chief Planner establish “a Mid-Rise Buildings Interdivisional Team to investigate methods to reduce obstacles and promote the development of mid-rise buildings” (1-2).

➔ This dedicated team should manage more than just *Avenue* Studies or the promotion of mid-rise buildings. **The City needs an *Avenues* Task Force**, led by tenured senior City staff, to act as a steering committee (Day, 2006). The Task Force should manage all future *Avenue* Studies if the City chooses to continue that approach to updating the zoning. Community planning representatives working in the study area should be invited to sit on the Task Force for the duration of their local *Avenue* Study, retaining local responsiveness.

The Task Force should also manage the evaluation, consultation, and education needed during *Avenues* Studies. This will maximize internal efficiencies possible in *Avenue* Study activities within the City, as well as provide a dependable resource for developers, councillors and members of the public who have questions about how the *Avenues* policies will affect their neighbourhoods and businesses.

A policy review of the *Avenues* leading up to the Official Plan review is also a job for the Task Force. I have suggested that the *Avenues* would better function as two conceptual visions for inner and outer Toronto. Only the inner strategy is supported by comprehensive research to date. Studies to support an outer City *Avenues* strategy are needed. This policy review would be wise to more explicitly articulate the founding ideals behind the *Avenues* strategy, as well as research from elsewhere that supports this approach. Part 2 of this evaluation begins this task.

Part 2: The *Avenues* Ideals

Several key ideals that underlie the City's *Avenues* policies deserve clearer articulation. The following themes came up time and again in my interviews, as well as in my review of materials leading up to the Official Plan's release:

1. We must be vigilant in protecting stable neighbourhoods.
2. Toronto's infrastructure is underused.
3. New *Avenue* buildings should be mid-rise and mixed-use.

While *Avenue* Studies do carefully consider ideas and opportunities for each study site, I suggest that the current *Avenues* policies framework would greatly benefit from an open debate about the intellectual foundations of this policy approach. My belief is influenced by Lynch's challenge to be transparent in policy decision-making, namely that:

Decisions about urban policy, or the allocation of resources, or where to move, or how to build something, *must* use norms about good or bad. Short-range or long-range, broad or selfish, implicit or explicit, values are an inevitable ingredient of decision. Without some sense of better, any action is perverse. When values lie unexamined, they are dangerous. (1981:1)

Perhaps some of the resistance to *Avenues* redevelopment, especially from citizens and their municipal advocates, is in reaction to their perception that the current policy approach is not supported by strong enough background research for all to be confident this idea can work. In the case of the outer City, as I suggested in Part 1, I think those concerns are well-founded. Still, if planners and policy-makers had a clearer rationale as to why these three ideals make sense, they could better respond to ideological challenges. What follows is a literature review addressing these ideals, offering suggestions and critiques to better buffer *Avenues* policies against objectors.

1. We must be vigilant in protecting stable neighbourhoods

Lura Consulting's Final Report on citizen consultation regarding the Draft New Official Plan outlines the commonly stated citizen concern about population growth disrupting well-established neighbourhoods (City of Toronto, 11 September 2002). Yet a September 16, 2002 staff report cites nine instances of the stable neighbourhood protection theme being articulated in an otherwise generally non-repetitive Plan. Despite these considerable efforts to ensure that protection of neighbourhoods is enshrined, participants in consultation sessions worried about massive development – especially along their neighbourhood *Avenues*.

In the record of these consultation sessions, then-Chief Planner Paul Bedford explains:

Instead of one storey strip malls for miles, big streets such as Kingston Road could accommodate buildings of 3 or 4 stories, which

could easily accommodate most of the projected population growth. Other *Avenues* could have higher buildings. Each *Avenue* will be studied, together with the local community, to set out the scale of new development. (City of Toronto, 11 September 2002)

More candidly in a 2006 personal interview, Mr. Bedford noted that the New Official Plan's Stable Neighbourhood policies in fact protect neighbourhoods *better* than the former MetroPlan. The MetroPlan allowed for a 1 times lot coverage density in stable neighbourhoods, but zoning prescribed a more stringent 0.6 times lot coverage density and 11 metre height limit. Because of this discrepancy, neighbourhood site redevelopments could sometimes take the form of "monster homes" under the MetroPlan provisions.

There are no density numbers in the new Official Plan, merely prescriptions that redevelopment has to be supportive of existing development (see section 2.3.1.1). Thus, now the lower-density, still in-force Zoning By-law solely applies. Unequivocally, Mr. Bedford feels that, in redeveloping the City's underused parcels, "the last thing you need to worry about is protecting stable neighbourhoods. They're protected" (2006).

The Main Streets Program was accompanied by research and publications regarding conflict resolution and community responses (Metro Toronto, 1989a & c). Perhaps an education campaign similar to the one that backed the Main Streets Program could protect stable neighbourhoods from, if not massive change, the fear of it.

Developers seem natural partners for this enterprise, and considering its possible positive effects on their work, it seems probable the City could get some support from the industry in a public outreach program. The Task Force should explore an education campaign, ideally in partnership with the development community. **Reach out to interested Torontonians about the reasons for and possibilities imbedded in incremental growth along their neighbourhood *Avenues*.**

Several themes have proven to be evocative rallying points for lively urban congestion. Jane Jacobs's arguments for an animated and diverse set of neighbourhood users to create a safe and exciting environment is frequently cited by both planners and community advocates (1961). Richard Florida's (2002) immensely popular vision of thriving urban places driven by their creative class, and Alexander Maller's more academic design guidelines for livable urban congestion and unpredictable encounters as respectively generators of diversity and an antidote for oversaturation (1999), are also strong visions. Further strategic research for this outreach campaign should be conducted during the public participation review.

2. Toronto's infrastructure is underused

Foremost among arguments against sprawl is the "costs of sprawl". Bruegmann (2005) attributes this to common-sense logic, that is, it costs less to build new developments closer together – less road, sewer and other infrastructure kilometres required – or, better, to reuse and upgrade existing infrastructure rather than building new (138-139). Both the

Province's Growth Plan Guiding Principles in section 1.2.2 and the City's Official Plan in section 2.2 articulate infrastructure efficiency goals to this end.

Yet Torontonians are accustomed to reading about the "cash-strapped" City endlessly requesting additional funds for especially transit and social services (Gray, 2007: A14). The February 2007 Conference Board of Canada *Mission Possible: Successful Canadian Cities* (Brender, Cappe and Golden) confirms that municipal revenue sources are not equal to their expenditure responsibilities. The Conference Board had in May 2005 also conservatively estimated Toronto's infrastructure deficit at \$7.2 billion dollars, this being the City's share of the estimated \$60 billion shortfall nation-wide. In Toronto, lack of funds is partially attributed to weak capital expenditure growth: the City cannot run a deficit on its capital budget, and without new revenue sources the City's primary supply of funds is the relatively static property tax.

Yet the argument to fit more people into the same supposedly "underused" service system and transportation grid is hugely popular with intensification advocates. So which is it? Is Toronto's infrastructure underused or oversubscribed? Several interesting studies have fleshed out this proposal for the Greater Toronto Area (GTA) case, including a 1997 study by Pamela Blais for the GTA Task Force and two reports by the Neptis Foundation in 2002 and 2003, the latter presented to Ontario's Smart Growth Panel. Generally these studies focus on hard infrastructure – roads, pipes, transit and plants – and compare costs of infrastructure in several "alternative futures" for the GTA:

- a business-as-usual model where growth continues apace in its current form
- a dispersed scenario where suburban and exurban sprawl accelerates
- a nodal model emphasizing centres, corridors and growth in urban nodes outside of the extensively populated Toronto Region
- a compact or condensed vision, where intensification is the primary form of growth

Of these alternative futures, within the City of Toronto only the last is truly an option – either that or no growth. While it is tempting to lose oneself in the purported colossal savings possible through compact development, really these savings are only available to areas with options in their growth patterns. Blais (1997) identifies as the key infrastructure capital cost components which vary through urban form as frontage costs (local streets and underground services), regional arterial roads, Provincial highways and expressways, transit and school bussing, and regional water and trunk sewer networks. Toronto has few opportunities to interact with these variables.

The Neptis *Toronto-Related Region Futures Study* (2003) suggests that, under the condensed scenario population growth will proceed as is projected in the Official Plan (approximately 500,000 new persons and jobs), increasing density from the 2000 baseline year of 78.1 persons and jobs per hectare to 96.9 persons and jobs per hectare. Neptis also predicts significant regional savings on transit costs but minimal change within Toronto. Toronto will face increased costs for water and wastewater provision and treatment within the City, due to a necessary additional plant expansion to handle increased capacity.

Regarding transit, while Gilbert (1987; 2006) is absolutely right that some areas served by Toronto's subway system, such as the Danforth, the far western Bloor line, the Sheppard line, or the northern Spadina line, are likely developed at a lower density than that system could support, the Yonge line is already operating above capacity. Similarly, many of Toronto's roads are already operating at or above capacity (Irwin, 22 September 2003). Parks, social services and other quality-of-life contributors are similarly felt to be strained within Toronto.

For energy provision, the City's energy supply is constrained by limits to the amount of energy the City can bring in through its two transmission corridors (Ontario Ministry of Energy, 3 April 2006). While the in-construction Portlands natural gas power plant and solar generation station will provide some additional in-City capacity, certainly the City's energy infrastructure is not underused.

In short, as Blais (1997) hinted, there is no likely windfall gain for Toronto as a City through intensification. Toronto's infrastructure is for the most part in place, with the exception of a few large brownfield sites presently lacking full urban services. As well, much of the City's infrastructure – particularly softer or social services – is strained as is. Councillor Stintz (2006) no doubt speaks for a large portion of Torontonians when she says that their local infrastructure is not underused – in fact, her constituents are feeling “squeezed out of their own neighbourhood”.

Still, the small incremental additions of *Avenue* units could be absorbed without overwhelming pressure on existing services. To be certain of this, *Avenue* Study selection criteria and assessment strategies as well as individual development proposal reviews thoroughly consider infrastructure and servicing concerns (City of Toronto, 6 January 2003). Perhaps the greatest weakness of this ideal is the disconnect between popular perception of capacity and actual technical figures.

➔ I recommend City planners and policy-makers **reframe the argument based on efficiency through intensification** – not just for the *Avenues*, but for the City as a whole. While some areas of the City clearly can accommodate additional population with current infrastructure, other parts are desperate for reinvestment even at present population levels. This is certainly the more persuasive argument for intensification: with development comes reinvestment, through the height and density bonusing provisions of section 37 of the *Planning Act*, through an increased consumer population for main street retail, through possible transit upgrades from bus to light rail where possible, and through coordination of various departments' efforts ideally inspired by an overarching process such as the *Avenue* Studies should be (Baird, 6 January 2007; Anonymous, 2006).

3. New *Avenue* buildings should be mid-rise and mixed use

A perceived-to-be massive interloper building along an urban *Avenue* is unlikely to be welcomed no matter how attractive its design may be. That said, several design approaches are more likely to be positively received by their users and surrounding neighbourhoods than others, given the prevailing assumption that new buildings should

fit into their existing context. Day (1992), in a study investigating the redevelopment of the historic Meers Park area of St. Paul's, Minnesota, found that fitting into the existing context does not necessarily mean mirroring historic building forms, but rather echoing key elements such as window placement, relationship to the sidewalk, entryways, and perceived "welcomingness".

Toronto incorporated these contextual principles very strongly in its Main Street-related 1989 proposals report, where consultants concluded that one-storey of retail and four storeys of residential units above could compliment the existing street character. The City also firmly articulates these ideals in its current, design-oriented Official Plan. But, on a neighbourhood scale, what kind of new development best supports existing form is a matter of lively dispute, and the City's mid-rise vision is certainly not garnering local support everywhere (see, for example, the Avenue Road case study).

Some of the resistance towards proposed mid-rise *Avenue* buildings likely stems from the fact that some streets' "existing context," namely what is there now, clearly does not fit with their "planned context," namely what is envisioned in the Official Plan for the future (City of Toronto, June 2006: 3-7). This planned context can be difficult to picture when the existing context seems to bear it little resemblance. The traditional main street of College Street between Bathurst and Ossington, or the taller, more dense King Street between Spadina and Bathurst, are local examples of what planners and policy-makers envision *Avenues* moving toward (Bedford, 2006; Day, 2006; Mizzi, 2006; Gilbert, 2007).

Further conceptual challenges are likely due to the fact that what is being proposed now on Toronto's major transportation spines is often taller than was earlier envisioned for the Main Streets Program – more King than College. I struggled to find substantive research beyond the economic rationales of economies of scale supporting this vision change, although it is likely explained by two factors. First, many streets now conceptualized for redevelopments under the *Avenues* policies are bigger than the former City of Toronto main streets. An urban design rule of thumb is that bigger streets can be framed supportively by bigger buildings, while narrower streets suit smaller buildings (Jacobs, 1993).

Also, sites envisioned for redevelopment under *Avenues* Studies – such as strip malls and parking lots – are generally larger than the former main street sites were. Average lot size on the sites identified for redevelopment in the main streets proposal was 337 square metres, with an average lot frontage of 10 metres and depth of 29.5 metres: not generous (City of Toronto, 1989: 10). Bigger buildings can be built on bigger lots, and bigger buildings are more likely to be economically viable in a mid-rise context (Kozak, 2005).

The Built Form policies at section 3.1.2 of the Official Plan note in a sidebar that, in Growth Areas such as the *Avenues*, the planned context takes precedence over the existing context for new proposals (3-7). Still, those same policies robustly emphasize fit, context, and sympathy to existing built form. Municipal law experts such as Stan Makuch, Jane Pepino, Susan Schiller and Robert Glover, in discussion, note that they are hard pressed to reach a clear definition of "fit", "context" and "sympathetic to" (2007). Luckily, new tools such as angular plane models, shadow studies and computer models

of new buildings massed into a photograph of the existing neighbourhood do offer some hope for at least a consistent standard from which to make context-oriented decisions.

Perhaps the simplest answer is that developing on *Avenues* is a learning process for all parties. This approach, if reasonable and practical, does little to calm the fears of neighbourhood representatives feeling under siege (Stintz, 2006). Guidance regarding universal good *Avenue* building form would likely go some distance to assuage the fears of neighbourhood activists – while Toronto is a lovely and unique city, there is no reason we can not use visions from elsewhere to promote our ideas at home.

➔ To start, I suggest planners and policy-makers **reference great streets from elsewhere**. Allan Jacobs' 1993 publication *Great Streets* offers many examples from his extensive studies of streets, a great number of which are framed by mid-rise buildings. Next, we should **state clearly why redevelopment along the *Avenues* should be taller than originally envisioned for Main Streets**: because of the change in street context to which the policies now apply.

Suggestions

Planning practice in Toronto would benefit from a clearer, more effective strategy to make the *Avenues* growth concept succeed on an applied, neighbourhood level. By explicitly acknowledging the *Avenue* policies' history, evolution, challenges and ideological foundation, planners and policy makers would be much better positioned to weather challenges ahead.

The Task Force should focus in its outreach program on the liveability improvements to be achieved by “injecting a population” along *Avenues* (Mizzi, 2006). It should cite classic, populist and evocative studies such as Appleyard's *Livable Streets* (1981) and Jane Jacobs' *Death and Life of Great American Cities* (1961), which argue that some level of creative congestion is best for urban living.

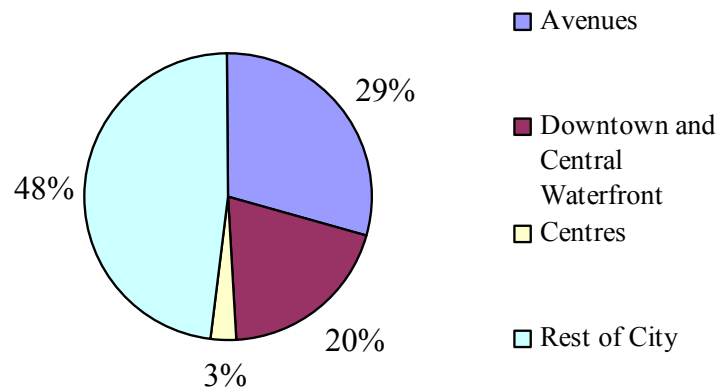
In its policy review, the Task Force needs to clearly articulate *why* mixed-use, mid-rise buildings are good along the *Avenues*, again using research and examples from elsewhere. This rationale should demonstrate how much intensifying *Avenues* would save (or cost) Toronto taxpayers on infrastructure investments, and how development can help us pay for it.

➔ These considerations would best be addressed in a **“Taking Stock” report on the *Avenue* Studies completed to date**. Specific examples of *Avenue* development applications and how they have been processed would show how the *Avenues* policies are being applied by community planners across the City. Part Three of this evaluation offers four case studies as a possible starting point and method for this assessment.

Part 3: Case Studies

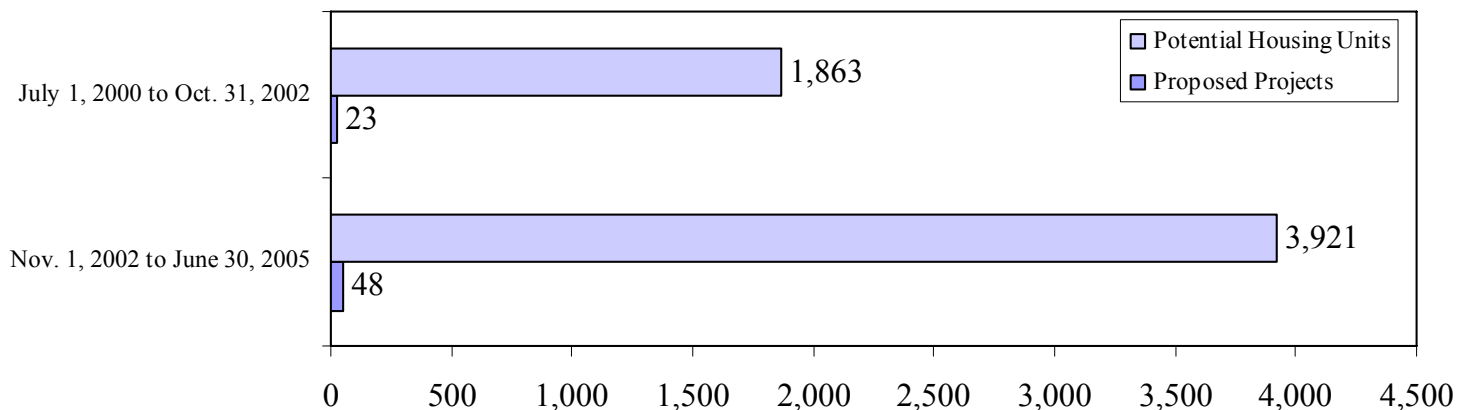
An information bulletin prepared for the Mid-Rise Symposium cited a total of 241 proposed mid-rise residential buildings between 2000 and 2005 (City of Toronto, November 2005). Just over half of these projects were proposed in Growth Areas of the Official Plan, and 29% of growth area proposals were along the *Avenues*. This is illustrated in Figure 2:⁸

Figure 2: Mid-rise Building Proposals in Toronto, July 1, 2000 to June 30, 2005



City staff note that the current pace of mid-rise development along the *Avenues* has not changed dramatically from prior to the Official Plan adoption, although on a city-wide basis it did increase after the November 2002 Council endorsement (see Figure 3).

Figure 3: Comparison of Project and Housing Unit Proposals, Pre- and Post-Official Plan



➔ Statistics are not available at present to compare building rates along those *Avenues* which have had an *Avenue Study* versus those which have not, and such a comparison

⁸ Figures 2 and 3 were generated from data in the City of Toronto (November 2005) *Profile Toronto: Mid-rise Residential Housing* bulletin.

is beyond the scope of this evaluation. The Task Force should include comparative application statistics for studied *Avenue* sections contrasted with unstudied *Avenues* in their “Taking Stock” report. Starting questions for analysis should include “how many applications have been filed which make use of the new as-of-right mid-rise zoning provisions?”, and “are *Avenue* Study results connecting with the market to produce the desired building typology and developments?” Even though these policies are fledgling, we could certainly learn from early indicators.

At present, oral evidence from planners suggests that where development has followed an *Avenue* Study, market conditions are likely the cause (Anonymous, 2006; Bedford, 2006; Day, 2006; Mizzi, 2006). Where development has failed, market forces and perhaps fundamental siting and retailing issues are to blame. This evaluation is better equipped to address the former; study of the latter is presently being conducted by my colleague, Orly Linovski (2007).

Approach

I reviewed four cases of mid-rise developments along the *Avenues* proposed and/or developed after Council’s March 1999 adoption of a framework proposed by staff to guide the development of the new Official Plan (City of Toronto, 25 January 1999). Two of these studies, on College Street and The Queensway, are sites of completed *Avenue* Studies, while the Lakeshore Boulevard case is east of a Study site and Avenue Road’s Study is underway. Site statistics for all cases can be found at Appendix 5.

These cases highlight some of the earlier noted challenges to *Avenue* redevelopments, with economic and communications issues particularly prevalent. They span the spectrum from a relatively smooth process resulting in a well-regarded mid-rise building, to protracted negotiations and market considerations resulting in an unpopular *Avenue* building form, to an ongoing struggle to align the planned context with the existing.

Cases

1. *The Ideal Condominiums, College Street*

- initial application filed October 21, 1998
- construction began in fall of 1999

Foremost among cited positive examples of mid-rise development along the *Avenues*⁹ is the Ideal Condominiums, a recent infill mid-rise development at the south-west corner of College and Bathurst Streets. While it is on lands later included in the College *Avenue Study*, that Study did not commence until 2003. As the new Official Plan was still in draft form, this proposal was not subject to the rigorous standards development proposals now must meet to proceed in advance of an *Avenue Study*.

⁹ For other City staff favourites, please see the portfolio of Toronto mid-rise successes Robert Freedman developed for the November 2005 Symposium, available at http://www.toronto.ca/planning/midrise_workshops.htm.

Considering the extensive research already done on that strip under the main streets initiative, it is unclear why an *Avenue* Study was required on College in the first place. Juxtaposing the Official Plan's stated practice that some *Avenues* "which function well already and have appropriate zoning in place may not need further study at all... and will be a low priority for *Avenue* reurbanization studies" (City of Toronto, July 2006: 2-16) against residents' stated advocacy for a study in their neighbourhood (Gilbert, 2007), it seems likely political pressure led to this study.

Official Plan and zoning amendments were passed by the City in 1999, permitting this nine-storey condominium building with live-work permission and retail at grade. The Ideal replaced a three-storey commercial building, and was considered during the application procedure as an improvement to the gateway to Little Italy and a welcome addition to the economic revitalization process underway in the neighbourhood at that time.



The Ideal Condominiums
College and Bathurst, Toronto

Several revisions to the plans resulted in a building massed largely on the College frontage, to permit greater step-downs to the stable neighbourhood behind it. Its height, 30 metres where 18 was formerly permitted, is noted by planners as "not out of context when compared to some of the other buildings in the immediate area", and its shadow impacts were considered acceptable (City of Toronto, 14 April 1999). The density increase from the prior maximum of 3 times the lot area to 4.9 was permitted to allow the developer to diversify unit size and maximize use of the site. Visual survey of the building confirms residents' impressions that it looks smaller than it is.

At the statutory public meeting for this proposal, held April 28, 1999, only one resident, Ms. Natalie Zlodie of the Little Italy Residents' Association, addressed the Toronto Community Council. By all accounts, besides some expected revisions, this application proceeded smoothly and produced a desirable result on an *Avenue*, if somewhat ahead of the increased formal process.

2. 975 The Queensway

- initial application filed April 2, 2003
- construction commenced in summer of 2005

This 1.2 hectare site, on the Queensway adjacent to Islington Avenue, was formerly occupied by a Canadian Tire store. In April of 2003, an application for two mid-rise mixed use *Avenue* buildings was filed for the site. The site was zoned Industrial at the time of application, but this filing immediately preceded City Council's consideration of a Queensway *Avenue* By-law, incorporating changes recommended through the recently completed *Avenue* Study.

The proponent requested permission to construct two buildings stepping back from the Queensway from 8 to 17 storeys in height, and containing 750 dwelling units and 1,200 square metres of commercial gross floor area. The prevailing character of The Queensway within the *Avenue* zone is one- to two-storey development, with occasional sections of four storeys in height, although a development application for a nine-storey frontage along The Queensway had recently been approved but not yet constructed for The Queenston Square.

The new By-law permits a floor space index of 3.0 times the lot area and a general height maximum of 6 storeys, or up to 8 storeys at key intersections. This supports the Etobicoke Official Plan designation of Commercial-Residential Strip on the front two thirds of the site, where up to 6 storeys is permitted respecting a 45 degree angular plane relative to surrounding neighbourhoods.

City of Toronto planning staff reported on this application to Etobicoke Community Council on May 21, 2003, and the matter was considered June 11, 2003. The site was deemed a larger development site requiring additional review. The applicant's proposal required amendments to the former Etobicoke Plan and to both the new *Avenue* By-law and the existing Industrial zoning under the Etobicoke Zoning Code, modifying uses, density and height.

These modifications were the subject of "lengthy negotiations" according to Day (2006), as a holdout landowner at the corner of Islington and The Queensway tried to call the proponent's bluff and failed, and city staff tried to rectify just-developed *Avenue* ideals with the applicant's vision. The applicant eventually appealed the City's refusal or neglect to pass Official Plan and zoning amendments to the Ontario Municipal Board on February 4, 2005. The applicant prevailed at the Board, and in March 2005 received a negotiated settlement modifying the proposal to a 74-townhouse development, the Regal Crest Townhouses.



Regal Crest Townhouses
The Queensway at Islington

Supervising city staff suggest that "everyone lost as a result of the process" in this case (Day, 2006): the developer lost valuable time and density, and the City missed out on a preferred *Avenue* building typology. This case is an interesting example, then, of the risks in an over-long process. Lengthy negotiations on a proposal that generally fits the planned context for the area can cause even interested developers to, in frustration, back out of a less secure mid-rise proposal and retreat to the relative safety of townhouses.

3. 3078 Lakeshore Boulevard West

- initial application filed December 10, 2001
- construction began in 2003

The townhouse development at 3078 Lakeshore is part of a larger parcel, formerly belonging to Goodyear, on Lakeshore Boulevard West between Ninth and Thirteenth Streets. In 1991 the applicant appealed to the Ontario Municipal Board a plan for the entire 8.06-hectare site, of which this application makes up about one quarter. A complicated settlement was reached and endorsed by the Board which zoned the subject lands for a mid- to high-rise density development, covered by a Holding provision pending resolution of school and park concerns, among others. The settlement made the site subject to a Site-Specific Policy requiring a minimum of 550 seniors' units, retail space (including a grocery store and office uses), a park, and a community centre. Up to 1,799 dwelling units were permitted under the Policy.

The Holding provision was lifted in 1997, and the applicant reapplied to the City in December 2001 to revise previously settled-upon Official Plan and Zoning provisions.

The applicant requested townhouses be included as a permitted use, wishing to scale down building form and number of units, and seek relief from the community centre, grocery store and seniors' housing requirements. City Staff considered this proposition in January 2002 (City of Toronto, 14 January 2002).



Lakeshore Boulevard Townhouses
Lakeshore Boulevard West, near Islington

While the community planner on the file is no longer with the City, his manager suggests that land value on this site was quite low, and did not rise as the proponent anticipated. Ms. Day (2006) notes that the original intent was to build an upscale, mid-rise development complementing the surrounding Lakeshore Village Development, but the developer likely concluded the neighbourhood was not increasing in value at the projected rate, and applied for the downzoning.

This case illustrates the challenge of implementing *Avenue*-type building forms where the market is not necessarily strong. Even with zoning in place for mid- to high-rise development, if the proponent does not feel confident in the market, townhouses become a preferred option. In this case, waiving the Site-Specific Policy not only compromised *Avenue* built form objectives, but also had a negative effect on community amenity. Where previously retail services, a park and a community centre were to be included with the development, the community now has an increased residential population without any additional services in the downzoned development.

4. 1705-1745 Avenue Road

- initial application filed November 10, 2004
- presently before the Ontario Municipal Board

This site, between Wilson Avenue and Lawrence Avenue West, is a rare large, deep site accumulated under one ownership on a thriving retail strip. It is also located in one of the City's strongest and most affluent established neighbourhoods.

The southern portion of the site is currently occupied by single-storey commercial buildings: a video store, bank, restaurant and LCBO, to a total of approximately 2,345 square metres of gross floor area. The northern portion of the site is a surface parking lot. In the surrounding area, only one other property, at the northwest corner of Avenue Road and Lawrence Avenue, has similar characteristics (City of Toronto, 24 August 2006: 12).



Riocan Avenue Road Site
Avenue Road, north of Lawrence

The combination of a thriving market, large site, underuse and assembled ownership clearly mark this site as an opportunity for reurbanization as described in the *Avenues Policies*. A developer as well as a holding company, Riocan and Avefair, proposed a building of 7 storeys with a 45 degree angular plane, underground parking, and retail at grade, which they feel fits the *Avenues* ideal. Plans for the site have evolved through three submissions to try to reflect community concerns about height, density, traffic, massing, shadows, and assorted other planning concerns.

As this proposal is the first to proceed on an *Avenue* in advance of an *Avenue Study* under the new Official Plan, the applicant is piloting the provisions at section 2.2.3.3, which outline the process for development in advance of a Study. The applicant has completed a comprehensive review of the surrounding area's capacity as is required under that section. An *Avenue Study* has since been approved for the area and is underway (City of Toronto, 7 February 2006).

While the applicant secured planners' support of the proposal, the local Ward Councillor and several residents' groups are providing well-organized resistance (North York Community Council Clerk's Office, 29 January 2007). The matter is currently before the Ontario Municipal Board, with the three-week hearing set to begin on April 16, 2007 (City of Toronto Solicitor, 25 January 2007). Council has directed the City Solicitor to retain outside planning counsel for the upcoming hearing (Toronto City Clerk, 25 September 2006).

As Community Planner Colin Ramdial noted, this proposal is an excellent negotiation case study (January 2007). The planned context is proposed in this case, but the

community wishes to retain the existing. How the Board determines this case will greatly influence future developers' willingness to implement the *Avenues* ideal on established major streets where there are underused parcels. Mid-rise buildings are often less profitable than high-rises (Kozak, 2005). Therefore, if unclear policies, market downturns, or fear of the unknown do not stop developers from considering a mid-rise development along an *Avenue*, the prospect of a million-dollar Board hearing most certainly will.

Challenges encountered in case study research

These cases offer only a small window into the procedural challenges faced by planners and policy-makers attempting to apply a broad concept to diverse contexts. Certainly a full assessment of development applications along the *Avenues* since the 1999 conception of the Official Plan would help the Task Force assess policy effectiveness.

A good model for this type of assessment can be found in the evaluation of the GTA Urban Structure vision, prepared for the Canadian Urban Institute in 1997 by Glenn Miller, Janice Emeneau and John Farrow. In their assessment, Miller, Emeneau and Farrow analysed the components of the program: policy framework, infrastructure support, and response from the development community. They conducted interviews of key planners managing each of these components, and backed up these interviews with secondary research. Miller, Emeneau and Farrow drew conclusions from their assessment and presented targeted recommendations in five areas: policy, infrastructure, development, monitoring and communications.

This method did not prove entirely possible for the *Avenues* cases, primarily due to a dearth of interviewees. Indeed, the challenge for anyone trying to conduct such a review again in the future is almost certain to be primary data collection: community planner turnover is quite high, which "weakens the institutional memory" (Miller et al., 1997: 7), and developers tend to be hesitant to participate in evaluative, recorded exercises. For this set of cases, in all but the in-progress Avenue Road application the community planner who processed the submission is no longer with the City; in the Avenue Road case the planner is still on staff but not at liberty to speak due to the upcoming hearing. Much of the primary information thus comes from section managers with the City, who managed the broader process if not the details. As well, no developers were willing to speak about their experience.

Recognizing *Avenue* development is a long-term policy goal, these studies would certainly benefit from the continuity and coordination senior staff within that Task Force could provide. As well, perhaps policy staff from within the City would be better equipped to reach key parties and get their input.

➔ Summary of Recommendations

Toronto needs dedicated Staff on the *Avenues* agenda to review the performance of both *Avenue Studies* and policies. An *Avenues* Task Force, led by tenured senior City staff, will provide continuity to the *Avenues* agenda, increasing efficiency and accessibility.

The Task Force's first job should be a "Taking Stock of the *Avenues*" Report, collecting data that compares *Avenue* development in different contexts. How many applications have been filed which make use of the new as-of-right mid-rise zoning provisions? Are *Avenue* Study results connecting with the market to produce the desired building typology and developments? What about the townhouses being built along the *Avenues* where opportunities arise: How successful an *Avenue* building form are they proving to be, and why? As well, does leaving large, outlier sites for individual consideration support the City's *Avenue* redevelopment goals, or are key opportunities sliding away? Answers to these questions will form the basis of an *Avenue* Study performance evaluation to date.

The policies themselves should also be reviewed. Three key areas for improvement are:

- 1. Recognize that the City has inner and outer *Avenues***

Toronto has two main types of *Avenues*: those on older, former City of Toronto main streets, and those on the outer suburban major streets of the amalgamated City. A comprehensive set of studies was conducted in the early 1990s to plan modest intensification along the former City's main streets. While this research continues to guide incremental growth on these *Avenues*, it is not as good a fit with outer City *Avenues*.

As these former suburban major streets are the key intensification opportunities, a broad consideration of how to guide and support their incremental growth is needed. Currently planners and policy-makers are using the *Avenue* Study framework to accomplish this, but this tactic is too slow and too piecemeal to result in a comprehensive outer City *Avenue* vision. An outer *Avenue* zoning by-law like that which governs the former main streets, with studies to support its recommendations, would be a more efficient and effective method.

- 2. Improve civic education and engagement about the *Avenues***

Further pursuit of the City's "Improving the Planning Process" initiative, accompanied by a broad *Avenue* Study public participation strategic review, could greatly improve the prospects of modest intensification in Toronto. The Task Force should pursue an education campaign created and delivered in partnership with the development community. The goal of this campaign should be to reach out to interested Torontonians and engage them in the reasons for and possibilities imbedded in incremental growth along their neighbourhood *Avenue*.

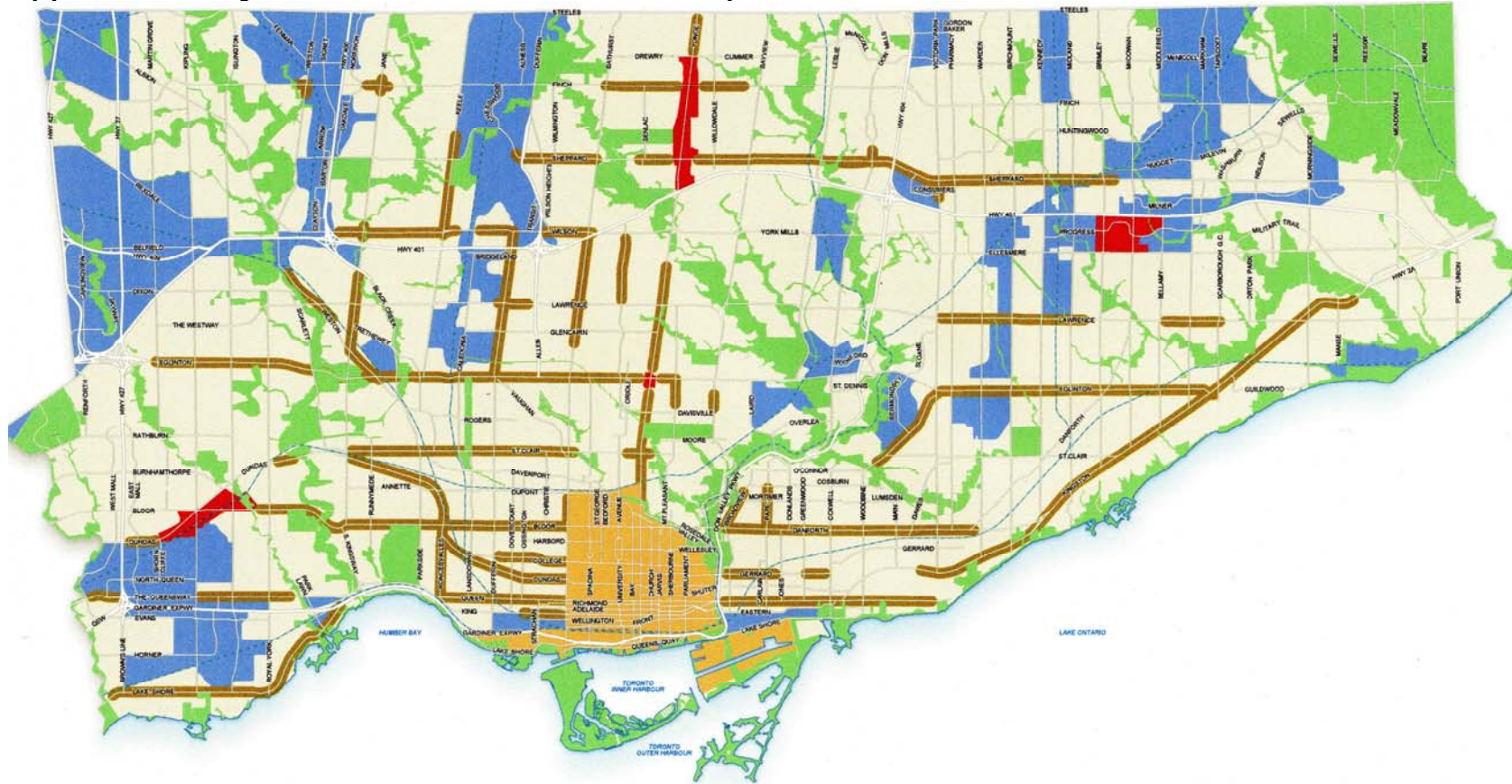
3. Reframe the efficiency through intensification argument

The substantial savings promised by intensification advocates generally refer to efficiencies that can be gained by moving to a more compact urban form. Toronto is already compact and urbanized: the infrastructure efficiencies available are instead found through use of development charges, section 37 contributions, and increased property-tax-paying population gains through development to offset infrastructure maintenance costs.

The combination of a dedicated Task Force, a thoughtful “Taking Stock” report considering – and defining – *Avenue* successes and missed opportunities to date, and a policy review geared to fine-tuning the *Avenues* policies prior to the Official Plan five-year review, would greatly aid planners’ and policy makers’ objective of achieving modest intensification along Toronto’s *Avenues*. As well, for the remaining majority of *Avenues* awaiting study, organizational efficiencies through a common Study Team and an outer *Avenues* research and policy framework will make reurbanization a more achievable goal.

Appendices

Appendix 1: City of Toronto Urban Structure Map¹⁰

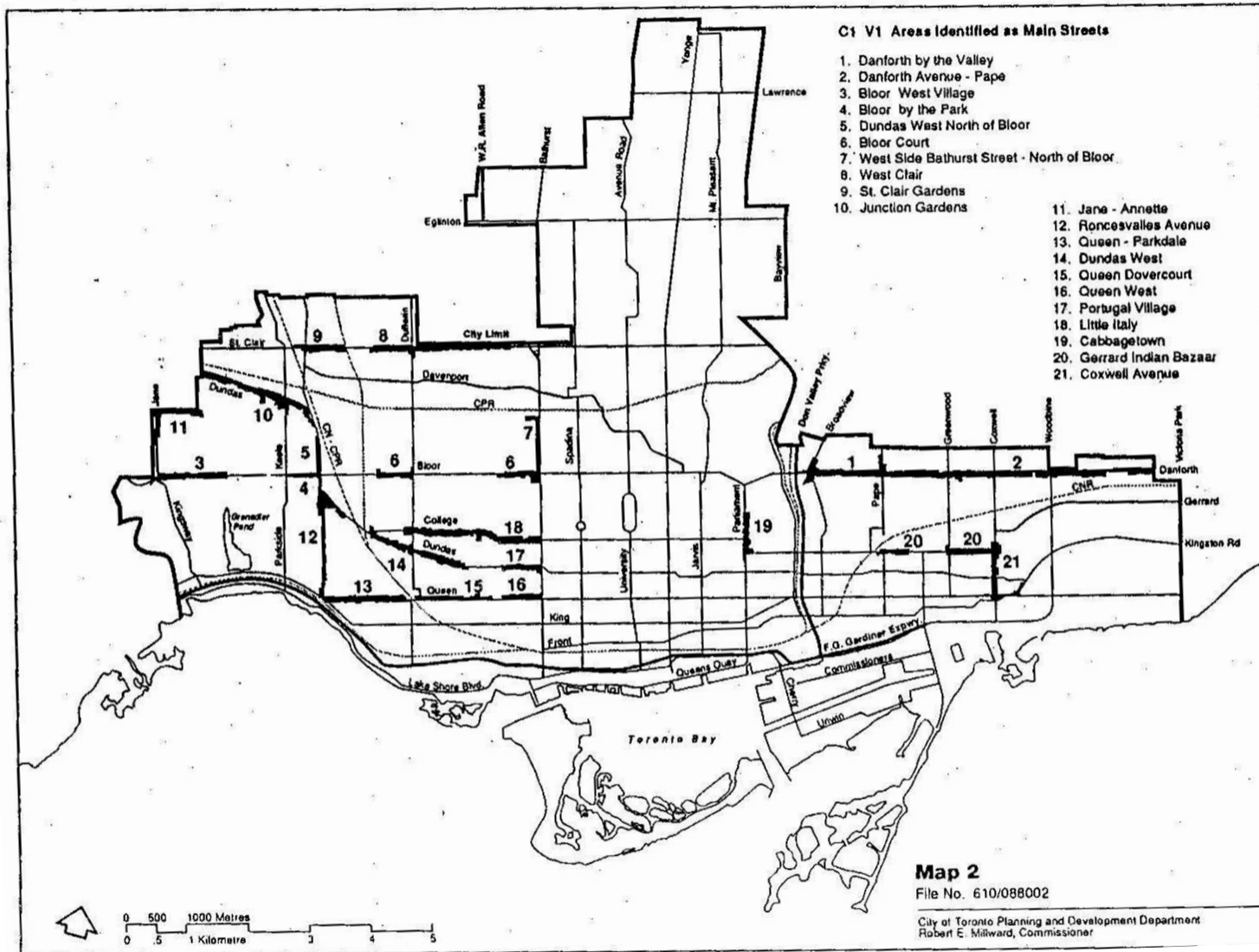


	Avenues	Green Space System
	Centres	
	Employment Districts	
	Downtown and Central Waterfront	

TORONTO OFFICIAL PLAN Urban Structure
MAP 2 June 2006

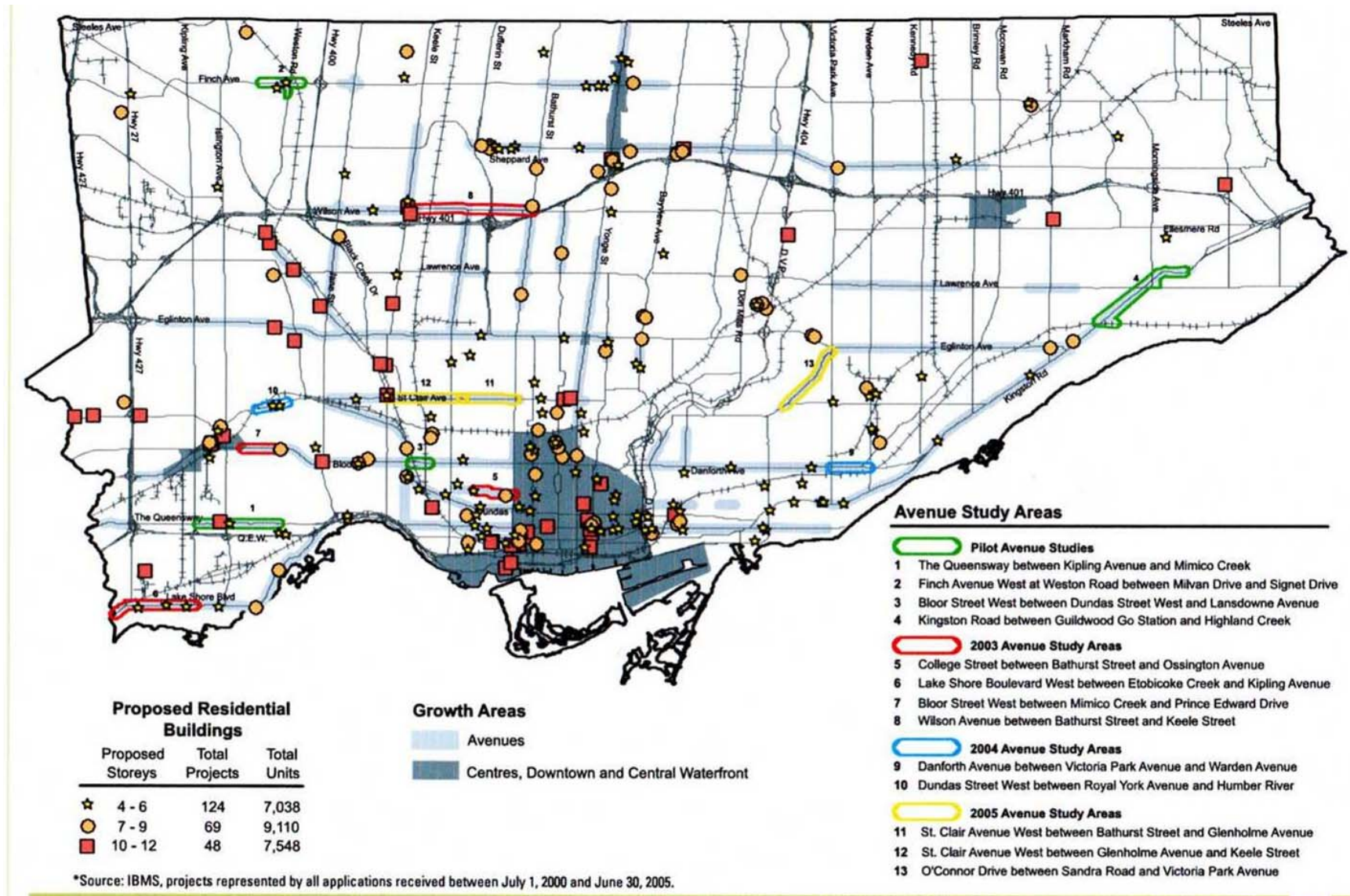
¹⁰ City of Toronto (June 2006).

Appendix 2: Main Streets¹¹



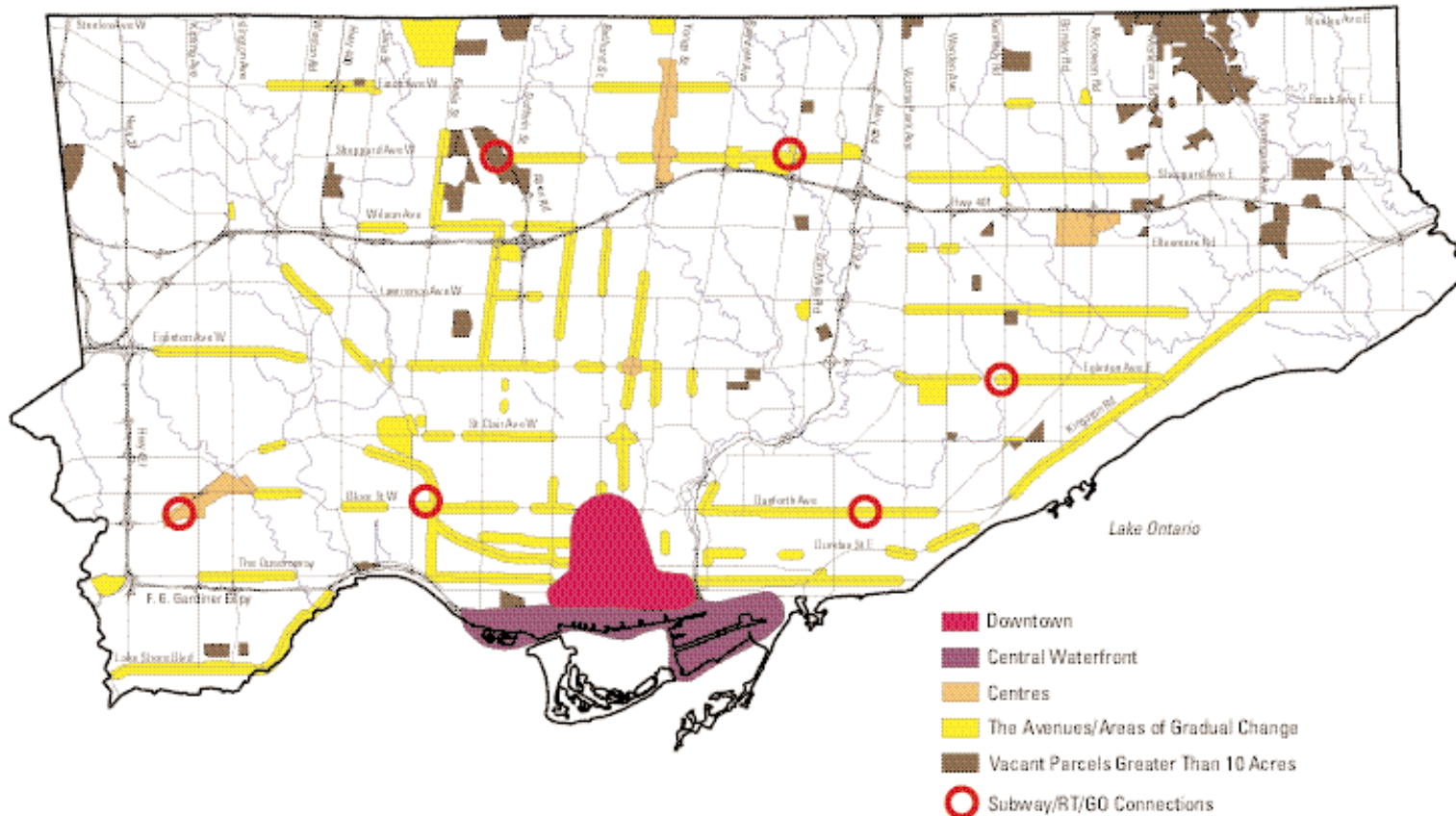
¹¹ City of Toronto (July, 1989): 27-28.

Appendix 3: Mid-rise along the *Avenues*, 2000-2005¹²



¹² City of Toronto (2005).

Appendix 4: Incremental Change Areas, 2000¹³



¹³ City of Toronto (2000): 28.

Appendix 5: Case Study Site Statistics

1. Municipal Address	457-471 College Street and 301 Markham Street
Developer	Context Developments Inc.
Application Details	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Original application to amend the Official Plan and Zoning By-law filed October 21, 1998 → Preliminary Planning Report filed December 22, 1998 → Public Meeting held March 1, 1999 → Revised plans submitted March 24, 1999 → Revised plans and application submitted April 6, 1999
Official Plan Designation (Former City of Toronto Part I Official Plan)	Low Density Mixed Commercial-Residential Area
Zoning (City of Toronto Zoning By-law 438-86)	Commercial Residential – CR T3.0 C3.0 R3.0
Height Limit	18m
Site Specific Provisions	No
Historical Status	No
Site Plan Control Area	Yes
Site Area	1,394m ²
Frontage	36.6m
Depth	
Total Ground Floor Area (GFA)	1,104m ²
Total Residential GFA	6,221m ²
Total Non-Residential GFA	617m ²
Total GFA	6,838m ²
Indoor Amenity Space Required Built	136m ² 42m ²
Outdoor Amenity Space Required Built	136m ² 0 m ²
Lot Coverage Ratio	
Floor Space Index Permitted Built	3.0 5.0

Storeys Permitted Built	9 + Mechanical Penthouse
Height in Metres Permitted Built	18m 30m
Parking Spaces Car Residential Required Built Commercial Bicycle	96 68 56 40 52
Loading Docks	1
Dwelling Units	
Bachelor	0
1 Bedroom	44
2 Bedroom	24
3+ Bedroom	0
Total Units	68

2. Municipal Address	975 The Queensway
Owner	Canadian Tire Corporation
Application Details	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Original application to amend the Official Plan and Zoning By-law to allow 750 dwelling units and approximately 1,200m² filed April 2, 2003 → Official Plan and Zoning By-law amendments for 74 townhouse unit development approved by the Ontario Municipal Board on February 4, 2005 → OMB order on the site plan and conditions of site plan approval issued March 21, 2005
Official Plan Designation (Former City of Etobicoke Plan) City of Toronto	Front (2/3): Commercial Residential Strip Rear (1/3): Industrial Mixed Use Area and Employment Area
Zoning (Etobicoke Zoning Code) Also subject to an <i>Avenue</i> By-law following from the <i>Queensway Avenue Study</i> ,	I.C1 – Class 1 Industrial

By-law 514-2003	
Height Limit Commercial Residential Strip <i>Avenue</i> By-law	6 storeys 6 storeys, 8 storeys at key intersections
Site Specific Provisions	No
Historical Status	No
Site Plan Control Area	Yes
Site Area	1.2 hectares
Frontage	54m
Average Depth	160m
Ground Floor GFA	5,012m ²
Total Residential GFA	58,861m ²
Total Non-Residential GFA	1,185m ²
Total GFA	60,045m ²
Lot Coverage Ratio	50%
Floor Space Index Permitted 1 st Proposal Built	3.0 5.0
Storeys Permitted 1 st Proposal Built	8 storeys along west portion of the frontage at <i>Islington Avenue</i> and the <i>Queensway</i> , 6 storeys on the remainder 8 storeys along the <i>Queensway</i> frontage, stepping back to 17 storeys 74 Townhouses
Height in Metres 1 st Proposal Built	23, 31, 39 and 47m
Parking Spaces 1 st Proposal Built	938
Loading Docks	1
Dwelling Units	
1 Bedroom 1 st Proposal	450
2 Bedroom 1 st Proposal	300

3+ Bedroom	0
Total Units 1 st Proposal Built	750 74

3. Municipal Address	3000-3078 Lake Shore Boulevard West
Applicant	Davies Howe Partners Corporation
Application Details	→ Original application to amend the Etobicoke Official Plan and Zoning Code filed December 10, 2001 → Preliminary Planning Report filed January 14, 2002
Official Plan Designation (Former City of Etobicoke Plan)	Mixed Use
Zoning District Prior By-law 1991-27 Gained	MU – Mixed Use and MU-H – Mixed Use – Holding R4G – Group Area Fourth Density Residential
Height Limit	
Site Specific Provisions	Yes - #33
Historical Status	
Site Plan Control Area	Yes
Site Area	2.21 hectares
Frontage	36.6m
Depth	
Ground Floor GFA	10,147m ²
Total Residential GFA	21,880m ²
Total Non-Residential GFA	0m ²
Total GFA	21,880m ²
Lot Coverage Ratio	48%
Floor Space Index Permitted Built	3.0 0.99
Storeys Permitted Built	3

Parking Spaces	308
Loading Docks	1
Dwelling Units	
Bachelor	0
1 Bedroom	0
2 Bedroom	104
3+ Bedroom	64
Total Units	168

4. Municipal Address	1705, 1717, 1719, 1743 and 1745 Avenue Road
Developer	Riocan Real Estate Investment Trust and Avefair Holdings Inc.
Application Details	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Original application to amend the Official Plan and Zoning By-law filed November 10, 2004 → Revised proposal filed November 3, 2005 → Owner appealed to the Ontario Municipal Board May 18, 2006 based on the City's failure to adopt the Official Plan Amendment within 180 days of filing the application and to enact the Zoning By-law Amendment within 120 days of filing the application → Revised proposal filed July 12, 2006 → Considered by North York Community Council on August 24, 2006 → Planning supports the application; Council did not → OMB Prehearings held on October 20, 2006 and February 20, 2007
Official Plan Designations (North York Official Plan deemed to be in force)	ACA – Arterial Corridor Area RD1 – Residential Density One
Zoning (North York Zoning By-law 7625)	C1 – General Commercial R3 – One-Family Detached Dwelling Third Density Zone
Height Limit	
Site Specific Provisions	
Historical Status	
Site Plan Control Area	Yes
Site Area	5,070.34m ²

Frontage	92m
Depth	67m
Total Ground Floor Area	3294m ²
Total Residential GFA	13,775m ²
Total Non-Residential GFA	2,585m ²
Total GFA	16,360m ²
Lot Coverage Ratio	63.86%
Floor Space Index Permitted (C1) Permitted (ACA) Proposed	1.0 2.0, up to 2.5 on site at major intersections where the depth is sufficient to buffer impacts on adjacent stable neighbourhoods 3.2
Storeys Permitted Proposed	Generally 3 to 6 7
Height in Metres Permitted Proposed	Generally not exceeding one-half of the width of the planned right of way (<i>Avenue Road</i> is planned to be 27m wide at the Site) 22.5m: 13.5m high along <i>Avenue Road</i> frontage, upper storeys step back on a 45 degree angular plane
Parking Spaces	249
Loading Docks	3
Dwelling Units	
Bachelor	2
1 Bedroom	48
2 Bedroom	51
3+ Bedroom	2
Total Units	103

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