

Burlington Urban Design Advisory Panel

Term 1 Report.

July 23, 2020.

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Mr. Evershed

On behalf of the volunteer members of the Burlington Urban Design Review Panel I would like thank you, Jamie Tellier and the City of Burlington for inviting us to be part of City's inaugural panel. This report, as requested in the Terms of Reference for the panel, provides a short overview of the panel's work, its successes and the general trends we are seeing in the proposed developments that have been presented to the panel.

During our first term the panel reviewed 27 applications at 13 meetings from March 2018 to January 2020. Staff were well prepared for the meetings and in the majority of cases, the material submitted by the applicants was complete and the designs developed to the point that a fulsome discussion could take place and relevant comments provided. Comments were well received by the applicants and have resulted in changes to the developments that have moved forward. Given the multi-year process required to approve many of the large and complex projects that have come before the panel and the holding by-law implemented by the City in 2018 a more fulsome review of the impact of our work would be better undertaken at the completion of the next panel's term in two years.

It is apparent from the proposals we have reviewed that there is pressure from the development industry for high density intensification in the City of Burlington. Many of the proposals reviewed have far exceeded the height and the set back requirements of current City zoning and planning documents. In doing so these developments generally propose a significant change to the existing character of the areas they are proposed for.

Good design can mitigate the negative impacts of these developments in terms of views, the pedestrian environment, landscaping, shadow, overlook, context and many other aspects. However, where there is not a clear direction from the City defining the evolving density of an area balancing the market need for intensification with community character these projects may simply be too large for their sites to make a positive contribution to the community. These projects if approved may set a precedent that will undermine the City's ability to provide a high-quality public realm in future.

The panel has often wrestled with the question of how from a design perspective does the proposed height and massing of these proposals make a positive contribution to the character of the area? In some cases they do, acting as a gateway to a proposed higher density area, supporting higher order transit or anchoring a proposed mixed use node but on many occasions there has not been an appropriate answer for this question.

The Terms of Reference for the panel calls for the panel to "Ensure an effective working relationship between staff and building industry by clearly establishing urban design expectations in early stages of development application to avoid wasted time and effort."

We understand that the City is working under tight time lines to update the official plan, secondary plans and zoning to better set expectations and to guide intensification in the downtown and across the City. Staff have brought several policies to the panel for comment in the past. The panel would welcome the opportunity to provide more input on current policy development. The panel's design perspective and experience in other communities may provide insight into striking a more successful balance between existing community character and the evolving need for densification from the development industry.

The panel may also be able to advise on tactics and standards to encourage better public realm design. In several proposals there have been opportunities to improve the pedestrian realm through better collaboration and coordination between City staff and private developers. The panel would recommend that City standards, especially in areas of intensification be revised to encourage better coordination and collaboration with the private sector in terms of district plans, connections and access across public property, community benefits and the development and encouragement of publicly accessible private property.

The panel members are passionate about the role good design has in the creation of high quality shared public spaces and in the health of our communities. The panel has defended the need for the municipality to be able to guide design to the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing when the Ontario Association of Architects and others in the development industry were calling for changes to the Planning Act that would limit the municipality's and community's role. During this term the professional architects, landscape architects and urban designers that sit on the panel have collectively volunteered over 650 hours of their time. This is a testament to their dedication to the

interdisciplinary design panel process and the increased sustainability, livability and quality of life design excellence can bring to the community.

We look forward to the continuing work of the panel and its contribution to improving the quality of Burlington's public realm.

Sincerely

Ken Coit, B.E.S., B.Arch., OAA

Chair

Jana Kelemen, M.Sc.Arch., MUDES, MCIP, RPP

Vice Chair