

Notes on Southwest campus secondary plan walkabout

Circulated to University of Toronto Area Liaison Committee, Jan. 8, 2017.

We in Harbord Village were most appreciative of the Southwest sector walk we had a month or more ago. It was remiss of us not to put our thoughts in writing. We wanted to ensure that the issues we identified during the walkabout not be lost. They follow, in no particular order.

First, we recognize there may be limits to the level of detail of a secondary plan. Nonetheless, the process has clearly identified the desirability of as much detail as possible.

In particular, the notion of flexi-heights by section is not reassuring. We very much believe in massing, height and density specifics so that in approving a plan, we actually know within some reasonable certainty what might be proposed and where.

Second, Huron Street, south of Russell, got little attention from us, and may require little attention (beyond increasing setbacks that we find unreasonably narrow). It may be that we could look at some kind of streetscape design pattern to make that section of the street more attractive. At the same time, there will be a number of potential replacement buildings, so there should be some thought to creating a greener, more inviting streetscape.

Third, the Huron spine and St. George, from Harbord to Russell.

We believe an area study is essential. We see advantage in splitting the southwest sector at Russell. The secondary plan revision process has clarified for us how critical are the rules around replacement buildings along both these streets, particularly when buildings are likely to span the block between St. George and Huron. There is a possibility of doing something exciting based on the relationships of buildings to both streets. St. George is the more formal frontage. We need to clarify what Huron should be. At a minimum, this section should be planned around the improved Willcocks common, so a new Sid Smith, Chemistry, New College relate to one another and to the new streetscape.

Fourth: in general, we think there should be more thought given to whether a 3-metre setback will be sufficient to create to a green, pedestrian-friendly streetscape.

More specifically:

College:

Preserving and enhancing the treed promenade is desirable.

Russell Street:

The east-west view shed to 1 Spadina and the dome of Convocation Hall is significant. Buildings on both north and south sides, should have generous setbacks to protect those views.

The proposed build to lines on the southwest corner of Huron and Russell will encroach on the view. Infill at the southeast corner of Huron and Russell should be moved to the south—possibly in line with the heat plant. As well, infill on the north west corner of Russell and St. George should be existing, not reduced.

We were concerned about shadow impacts of taller buildings to the south on the north sidewalk.

Bancroft:

Shadow impacts of any infill on the south side would be undesirable.

The street is an oasis, in part because of its generous setbacks and street design. The ginkgos are doing well. It creates a comfortable pedestrian realm.

The suggestion was made that there were places on campus where the plan should specify there be no additional infill. This would not prevent an application from coming forward, but would increase the need for a good planning justification for increasing massing or height on the existing streetscape.

Spadina, south of Bancroft:

Any expansion of the dairy building should be sufficiently stepped back along Russell that the heritage roofline and building form should present clearly as it is presently articulated. We identified a build from line, which left the roofline clear.

Along the southeast side of loading area, there is potential for infill that would not encroach on a complete sense of the heritage building.

Spadina, New College:

Our community would be deeply distressed at the idea that New College might build a supplementary residence on the Spadina flank, which presently has a greenspace with mature ash trees which have been saved from the ash borer, at great expense. We agree the walled frontage needs to be opened up, but do not agree with the removal of the green flank.

Should New College expand, we recommend the University look to building up on the north side, as the survival of the trees in the interior quad must be given priority.

Classic Avenue:

We were astonished at the notion Classic would be closed and a new building put on Huron Street. If there is to be a replacement for the Benson frontage (desirable), there needs to be real thought given to what the Huron front is going to be.

(In retrospect, there is need to consider how to improve the Athletic Centre/New College presentation to Spadina. Is it a site for New College Residence expansion?)

Harbord/St. George:

The community has long defended the front lawn between Huron and St. George. By this time in the walk, I think we were tired.

St. George from Harbord to Russell:

Prior to interventions on this section, there should be a fine-grain plan on what the area is to look like. Spot developments along general lines run the risk of creating infill that is not satisfactory.