1960 & 1962 Queen Street East
Urban Design Peer Review

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1. Introduction

The following Peer Review evaluates the built form and urban design quality of the proposed development at 1960 Queen Street East, in Toronto. Included as part of the review are:

- An evaluation of the architectural drawings prepared by RAW design in relation to the City of Toronto's Official Plan and Avenues and Mid-Rise Buildings Study, and the development's immediate context;
- A statement evaluating the proposed development against the existing Queen Street East – The Beaches Urban Design Guidelines (2004); and,
- An assessment to determine the integrity and reliability of the Avenue Segment Study completed by Armstrong Hunter & Associates.

2. Evaluation of Architectural Design Drawings

2.1. Proposed Uses

The proposed building is a mixed-use building, comprised of 29 residential units (1 and 2-bedroom) and 2 retail units on the ground floor. This unit mix encourages a healthy variety of residents, and is important in establishing complete communities. By providing this mix of uses the proposed building will establish a strong relationship between the building and the street, promoting an active streetscape on Queen Street East, and enhancing safety at all hours through "eyes on the street." The addition of residential uses overlooking the rear-lane will also help improve visibility of an area that is currently screened from public view.

The provision of consistent retail at grade reflects the recommendations of the Avenues and Mid-Rise Building Study **(Section 2.3.2)** which recognizes the development site as an Established District.

2.2. Building Height

At 6-storeys (20m), plus a mechanical penthouse, the maximum height of the proposed building reflects a 1:1 ratio with the width of the Queen Street East R.O.W. as recommended in the Avenues and Mid-Rise Building Study **(Performance Standard 1)**.

2.3. Building Massing

The proposed building generally conforms to the angular plane requirements prescribed in the Avenues and Mid-Rise Building Study **(Performance Standards 4A & 6)**, including a 45-degree angular plane (above a height equal to 80% of the R.O.W. width) on the front and west façades. These step-backs mitigate the shadow impacts on Kenilworth Avenue and Queen Street East, reduce the visual impact of the buildings upper floors from the street, and create useable private amenity space (i.e. balconies) for residents.

The proposed mechanical penthouse is stepped back beyond the requirements of the Avenues and Mid-Rise Buildings Study, minimizing visibility of the penthouse from street level.

The massing of the main building and its internal habitable space falls within the angular plane requirements prescribed in the Avenues and Mid-Rise Building Study **(Performance Standards 4A & 6)** with only a marginal extension of building elements into the prescribed angular planes, including balconies and canopies (i.e. Level 4, 5, and 6) on the west and south façade. However, the proposed stepbacks are generally consistent with the intent of the

Avenues and Mid-Rise Buildings Study **(Performance Standards 4A & 6)** and would result in minimal additional shadow impacts on the adjacent streetscapes.

The site is presently zoned MCR, requiring a rear setback of 7.5m from the rear-property line, 10m from grade level. The proposal conforms to these setback requirements, and reflects the angular plane prescribed in the MCR zoning. The stepbacks and massing are also consistent with the intent of the Avenues and Mid-Rise Buildings Study regarding rear transitions to neighbourhoods **(Performance Standard 5A)** which aim to create appropriate transitions to adjacent neighbourhoods and minimize adverse shadow impacts.

2.4. Building Elevations

The proposed development will be an attractive asset to the neighbourhood. It represents high quality in urban design and architecture and is consistent with the recommendations of the Official Plan and The Avenues and Mid-Rise Buildings Study.

2.4.1. Queen Street (South) Elevation

At 4.5m, the proposed ground floor height facilitates retail uses at grade, and can accommodate servicing within the building. This is consistent with the Avenues and Mid-Rise Buildings Study **(Performance Standard 3)**.

The Queen Street West elevation is well-designed, with a continuous streetwall that promotes a comfortable, human-scale relationship to Queen Street. The façade is comprised of high quality and attractive materials (i.e. brick, glass and metal cladding). A variety of design elements are utilized to articulate the façade, including large brick bays, canopies, clear-glazed windows, a variation in materials, and multiple entrances. These features help to break-up the façade, and create a rhythm of detail that reflects the finer grain buildings on Queen Street East as recommended in the Avenues and Mid-Rise Building Study **(Performance Standards 14 & 15)**. In addition, greater than 60% of the ground floor façade is comprised of clear-glazed windows **(Performance Standard 15)** enhancing opportunities for casual surveillance and increased security.

2.4.2. Kenilworth Avenue (West) Elevation

The Kenilworth Avenue frontage has similar characteristics to the Queen Street Frontage, including the use of high quality materials, and a variation in detail that reflects the residential uses to the north. This is consistent with the recommendations of the Avenues and Mid-Rise Buildings Study **(Performance Standards 14 & 15)**. Additionally, above the 4th-storey, extensive glazing is used effectively to make the upper storey's lighter above the brick base, minimizing the perceived mass of the building from the street.

2.4.3. North Elevation

The design of the north elevation is proposed using high quality materials, and is generally consistent with the recommendations of the Avenues and Mid-Rise Buildings Study **(Performance Standards 14 & 15)**.

2.4.4. East Elevation

As is common on many main street or Avenue locations, no windows have been proposed on the east elevation. The developer has kept an acceptable "party wall" to accommodate future changes, through renovation, additions, or redevelopment, to the east. This also respects issues related to limiting distance (minimum protected openings) between existing lots. The stepbacks on the north and south sides of the building help to articulate the east elevation, allowing additional sunlight access and views from the street, and minimize the visual impacts that would result from a full blank wall.

As proposed, this elevation is comprised of the same high-quality brick material found on the Queen Street and Kenilworth Avenue elevations. This is appropriate to minimize impacts on the adjacent properties and consistent with the recommendations of the Avenues and Mid-Rise Building Study **(Performance Standard 8B)**.

2.5. Site Plan

The proposed development will result in an active, pedestrian-oriented streetscape, and is generally consistent with the recommendations of the Official Plan and The Avenues and Mid-Rise Buildings Study.

2.5.1. Queen Street Frontage

The frontage on Queen Street East promotes an active urban streetscape with buildings fronting directly onto the public sidewalk, and a continuous streetwall provided at the property line .

The Avenues and Mid-Rise Building Study recommends a 4.8m minimum sidewalk width (derived from the City's Vibrant Streets Manual) to accommodate an Edge Zone, a Continuous Tree Trench, and a 2.1m Pedestrian Clearway (**Performance Standard 7A)**. At 3.7m, the proposed sidewalk width is 1.1m less than recommended. However, this setback aligns with the existing properties to the east to create a consistent streetwall, and is still able to accommodate street trees and acceptable pedestrian circulation.

2.5.2. Kenilworth Avenue Frontage

Before tapering towards the north, the sidewalk on Kenilworth Avenue is 6m wide. This large sidewalk allows the building to provide amenity space to the neighbourhood, including landscaping, outdoor terrace areas, and seating. As proposed, the landscaping provides an appropriate transition to the residential neighbourhood to the north. At the corner (Kenilworth Avenue and Queen Street), this landscaping gives way to a small public area which could accommodate opportunities for seating, spill-out retail and/or display areas to complement the use on the west side of Kenilworth Avenue. As a corner site with two prominent frontages, the wider boulevard condition, particularly at the corner, helps compliment the slightly reduced boulevard on Queen Street.

2.5.3. Green Roofs

A significant proportion of the building's roof has been designed as a green roof. This will provide a positive visual amenity from the street, and environmental benefit. At 50% of the total roof area (154m^2), this landscaped area conforms to the City of Toronto's Green Roof By-Law and the recommendations of the Avenues and Mid-Rise Buildings Study **(Performance Standard 13)**.

2.5.4. Loading, Servicing and Vehicle Access

As proposed, loading, servicing, and vehicle access to the underground parking spaces is provided by a rear-lane off of Kenilworth Avenue. This will limit disruptions on Queen Street East, and is consistent with the recommendations of the Avenues and Mid-Rise Building Typology Study **(Performance Standard 17)**.

3. EVALUATION AGAINST EXISTING URBAN DESIGN GUIDELINES

The Urban Design Guidelines for Queen Street East – The Beaches were consolidated with other City guidelines in June 2004. The subject property was identified as part of the Western Regional District. The main goal of the guidelines is to ensure that new development is consistent with the scale and character of Queen Street East. To accomplish this, the guidelines recommend a building mass that is perceived as 3-storeys. While the proposed building is 6-storeys, we believe that its design and massing is consistent with the *intent* of the guidelines, recognizing that the existing guidelines are relatively old and now a more contemporary approach to low to mid-rise buildings is generally sought. A stepback above the 4th-storey results in a perceived appearance of a smaller-scale building for pedestrians on Queen Street East, while the articulation of the façade (please refer to Section 2.4.1) creates a rhythm that reflects the smaller scale retail buildings that characterize Queen Street East.

The proposed development otherwise conforms to the recommendations of the guidelines, providing access from the rear, strong massing elements, appropriate transitions to adjacent properties (including the neighbourhood to the

north), recessed balconies on Queen Street and Kenilworth Avenue, high-quality materials, and pedestrian amenities (i.e. canopies, landscaping, signage).

4. ASSESSMENT OF AVENUE SEGMENT STUDY

On November 15, 2011 Armstrong Hunter & Associates submitted an Avenue Segment Study (The Study) to Community Planning, Toronto and East York District. The following review evaluates the findings of the segment study based on the City's Avenue Segment Review Terms of Reference (November 2010).

4.1. Purpose and Summary

The Avenue Segment Study was prepared to comply with Section 2.2.3.3 of the City of Toronto Official Plan, and to demonstrate that the proposed development will establish a positive precedent for the future reurbanization of the avenue. Specifically, The Study was requested by the City, after the application was submitted, in response to issues raised at a community meeting. If approved, we understand some residents felt that this proposal could result in 'wholesale' change that would negatively impact the existing mixed use "main street" community on Queen Street East.

Through a block-by-block evaluation of the avenue segment, Armstrong Hunter & Associates demonstrate and conclude that the majority of the adjacent properties are 'stable' or 'unlikely' to easily develop into mid-rise buildings like the one proposed, due to a number of constraints (i.e. lot depth, ownership, heritage value, access). Furthermore, as the existing zoning allows for buildings up to 12m, and a significant number of buildings remain under this, it is unlikely that this one building will spur such 'wholesale' change.

We agree with the conclusions reached by Armstrong Hunter & Associates. As demonstrated in our peer review, the proposed development creates a positive precedent, on an appropriate corner site, that will not lead to significant change of the neighbourhood.

4.2. Discussion of the Proposal

The Study provides a brief description of the proposed site, outlining the characteristics that make it an appropriate site for mid-rise development, based on the following characteristics outlined in the Avenues and Mid-Rise Buildings Study:

- A corner lot location
- A lot width of 18m, depth of 46m, and regular configuration
- Access to an existing private driveway/lane
- Ability to accommodate underground parking
- An existing single-commercial use with limited rental apartments above
- Consolidated ownership with interest in redeveloping
- Not a heritage property

Armstrong Hunter & Associates recognize that the lot frontage (18m) is less than the ideal width (30m) recommended in the Avenues and Mid-Rise Building Study, but that with creative parking solutions, a building can be provided that fits more appropriately into the existing fine-grain context.

Based on the characteristics above, as well as the proposed solution for parking (vehicle lift), we are in agreement that the subject site is an appropriate site for mid-rise redevelopment.

4.3. Policy Context

The Study briefly outlines the existing planning framework, including the Official Plan designation (Mixed Use Area and Avenue), the Zoning By-Law (MCR - Mixed Commercial Residential), and adherence to the recommendations of the Avenues and Mid-Rise Buildings Study.

A key observation of Armstrong Hunter & Associates is that the existing MCR zoning allows mixed-use buildings up to 12m, but a limited amount of development has happened at this scale (i.e. a number of buildings remain at 1 to 2-storeys). As Brook McIlroy noted in the Avenues and Mid-Rise Building Study, this is a common occurrence along the City's Avenues (i.e. in the Beach, on Dundas Street West, College Street and Danforth Avenue), as successful mid-rise development must consider more than height, including an appropriate fit with the surrounding context, and a positive contribution to the overall character of the Avenue. Therefore, it is unlikely that the proposed building alone will stimulate redevelopment along Queen Street East.

Based on the limited potential for significant mid-rise development demonstrated in the block-by-block analysis completed by Armstrong Hunter & Associates (discussed further in Section 3.6), and the lack of development at the current 12m maximum, we agree that the proposed development will not result in the transformation of the avenue segment into a mid-rise corridor.

4.4. Avenue Segment Review Boundaries

In consultation with City Planning, Armstrong Hunter & Associates have set the avenue segment boundaries at Woodbine Avenue in the west, and Hambly Avenue in the east. Based on the Avenue Segment Review Terms of Reference, these boundaries are appropriate as they contain consistent land use (Mixed Use Areas), and beyond Woodbine Avenue there is a change in the character of the built form on Queen Street East (i.e. to newer mixed-use buildings). The boundary is also essentially the 'west' portion of the Queen Street East Beach community.

In addition, the selected boundaries represent the 'neighbourhood' within an approximate 400m radius from the study area, which is equivalent to a comfortable 5-minute walking distance.

4.5. Precedent Projects

Armstrong Hunter & Associates identify other recent relevant precedent projects (i.e. mixed-use, mid-rise buildings) within, or in close proximity to, the study area boundaries, including the buildings just west of the avenue segment boundaries. Their conclusion is that with all of these projects, this section of Queen Street East has seen less than 100 new condominium units in new mid-rise buildings over the last 20 years and this development is unlikely to cause significant change along the block.

Based on the limited potential for significant mid-rise development demonstrated in the block-by-block analysis completed by Armstrong Hunter & Associates (discussed further in Section 3.6), and the lack of development at the current 12m maximum allowed in the zoning, we are in agreement that the proposed development will not result in the transformation of the avenue segment into a mid-rise corridor.

4.6. Identification of Potential Soft Sites

Using the ideal characteristics outlined in the Avenues and Mid-Rise Buildings Study for optimal mid-rise building development, The Study provides a block-by-block evaluation to determine the potential for mid-rise development within the area in order to determine the impact the proposed building may have as a precedent for the remainder of the street.

Armstrong Hunter & Associates determined that a number of sites could *theoretically* be redeveloped at a mid-rise scale, but *in practice*, are not likely or appropriate candidates for mixed-use development as proposed at 1960 and 1962 Queen Street East. The majority of properties were either 'stable' (i.e. schools, heritage properties, existing multiple rental units) or 'unlikely' for mid-rise redevelopment due to a number of constraints (i.e. lot depth, ownership, heritage value, access).

Four sites, in addition to the subject property, were identified as potential soft sites for similar scale mid-rise redevelopment, including a gas station on a major street corner lot, a number of smaller properties with single-ownership, and a single-storey mall. Even on these sites, it is noted that on-going successful business interests would be a likely constraint to redevelopment.

Based on the limited soft sites identified above, it Armstrong Hunter & Associates conclude that, with the approval of the 1960 Queen Street development, there is limited opportunities for potential ‘wholesale’ change of the neighbourhood.

We believe that Armstrong Hunter & Associates provided reasonable rationale in determining the potential soft sites within the avenue segment, and are in agreement with those sites selected as potential soft sites. We also support their findings that due to these limited opportunities for mid-rise redevelopment on Queen Street East, the proposed building will not result in ‘wholesale’ change to the corridor.

In conclusion, we support the proposed development as a good example of mid-rise development on Queen Street East.