

Midtown OPA

How to bridge the gulf between the Public and Planners

A thought experiment

Presentation to February 27 2024 Special Council on Midtown OPA

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Joint Delegation on Midtown from Ward 3 Residents' Associations

(Chartwell-Maplegrove, Joshua Creek, Oakville Lakeside, Trafalgar-Chartwell)

Gathering comments from Feb 15 workshop



I started with pictures of the comments - more or less at the end of the evening, but maybe not all comments. It looks as if we had all comments in 39 pictures but there may have been sheets we did not get pictures of fully.

Then I typed all comments onto a spreadsheet verbatim, trying to place them in the correct column. There were over 280 comments captured.

I then colour coded the comments under logical headings of interest, which gives the audit trail to:

The summary of comments:

Density:

Support: 6 comments: More density enables more housing. Can create liveable community.

I wish: 2 comments: I wish we knew how different size units affect population

Concerned: 39 comments: Too dense for 43 hectares / 1 sq.km. Re-allocate across Oakville. JBPE numbers allocation challenged. PPU assumption challenged. Comparison to lower density in Burlington.

Built form:

Support: 3 comments: Looks amazing. I want to live here. Lifestyle tall buildings bring.

I wish: 11 comments; Preserve distinctive and small town characteristics. Consider lower heights. Consider tall towers not liveable. Learn from mistakes (St Jamestown). Lower style buildings. Height = crime.

Concerned: 16 comments. Tall buildings - want lower level more liveable scale. Tiny condos 65 sq.m. Too expensive. Not family friendly.

Transit, traffic, mobility, access

Support.
2 comments: Robust active transport - I can live and save \$\$, Pedestrian safety of bridges.

[illegible]

The public inform us:

280+ comments

Maybe more...

Extreme concern on all criteria

Far from supportive

Thesis

We agree with planners on many of the core principles for Transit Oriented Development (TOD) for all of Oakville

We agree with the need for population growth within Oakville, not on green fields.

We differ on how to get to the same objectives.

A Gulf:

Positions hardening, trust weakening: It is time to repair trust

What we agree on	What we don't agree on
Transit Oriented Development (TOD) is the basis for a connected, human scale community	Equating TOD with tall towers as the default build form
Avoid low density suburban sprawl that is car focused, isolating, expensive, unaffordable	Maximize land use with extreme density.
Transition to higher density housing, apartments in walkable neighbourhoods	Inhuman scale tall tower development
Reduction in need for cars is better for environment and health of population	Ignoring the potential to re-purpose single storey retail, office and commercial
Transition to higher order transit is critical to combat traffic gridlock	Ignoring the potential to spread some density to growth nodes, small village type low and mid-rise apartment communities around shops etc. connected by BRT (Bus Rapid Transit).
Denser apartment style housing to support more connected community - compact, walkable nodes	
Denser connected communities for a full mix of families - across the whole life-cycle	

Thought Experiment



All problems stem from cramming in too much density into a small land-locked area.

What if the public had been engaged in planning for growth over all Oakville as part of the JBPF process?

“What do I know. Hmmm - better quote the experts...”

2. What if the public had been engaged in planning for growth as part of the JBPE process?	
What has been planned	Best practices that would make Midtown Oakville
Building type	
Building type - tall towers	“Barcelona’s midrise example urban fabric is as valid an expression of TOD as Toronto’s high-rise forest around Yonge and Eglinton” (1)
“North America, Transit Oriented Development (TOD) has wrongfully become synonymous with mix-used tower developments on and around transit nodes and corridors”	“Successful TOD can and has been done without very high-density building types” (1)
	<i>“That developers, transit authorities, and municipalities often connect TOD and towers as a necessary duo is, at best, ignorant and at worst, deceitful”. (1)</i>
	It seems clear from their response to challenge that consultants hired by the Town cannot or will not adapt to other building forms
	If the Town would demonstrate that it will meet and even exceed Province building requirements by spreading density, it can justify a lower building form than the current OP.

What has been planned	Best practices that would make Midtown Oakville
Density	
<p>Focusing on “packing in” people on a single lot or small handfuls of sites.</p> <p>Maximizing land use with extreme density, not optimizing.</p>	<p>“A more appropriate response is to explore alternative building types that fit community desires while specifying and maintaining “higher density” targets in keeping with the principles of TOD. This involves taking into account more comprehensive approaches to growth and densification at the neighbourhood- and city-wide scales instead of focusing on “packing in” people on a single lot or small handfuls of sites.” (1)</p>
	<p>JBPE are the Town’s estimates and, in the long term, are 4 times the Province requirements. So we do not have to maximize land use.</p>
	<p>Other MTSA are not necessarily comparable - Midtown is “landlocked” with few access points compared to other MTSA’s.</p>
<p>A very few growth centres and corridors - packing them in approach</p>	<p>Multiple “village” mid-density communities along more routes, N-S and E-W</p>
	<p>Examples in Ward 3: Maple Grove village; Longo’s village; Whole Foods plaza; Speers-Cornwall corridor; Randall -Rebecca corridor</p>
	<p>Re-purposing of shopping malls and strip malls</p>
<p>Preserve existing neighbourhoods at all costs</p>	<p>Gentle densification and creation of dense villages (as above) connected with Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) and LRT</p>
	<p>Transition to local community and transit and away from cars; requires more transit, more local shops in walking distance across all of Oakville</p>
	<p>Spread the growth, create liveable communities</p>
<p>Escalating land values in anticipation of 50 storey towers</p>	<p>Gentler approach to land use; more affordable land values across the town = more affordable homes.</p>
	<p>Less land banking; less speculation in land values; less undue influence from developers</p>
	<p>Use of land use tools to optimize community needs</p>

What has been planned	Best practices that would make Midtown Oakville
Transit	
Transit not part of the plan	“Transit and new forms of shared mobility must be at the heart of transportation in the next generation of cities” (2)
Bus Rapid Transit route not prioritized	Seen as a critical priority; and a core principle for successful midtown without gridlock
	Example: “Los Angeles voted \$400bn for transit - and zero for new highways” (2)
	Car free lanes so transit can move; transit able to change traffic lights to keep flowing, etc.
	“Make networks of transit, new forms of shared mobility, and active transport more desirable, affordable, and ubiquitous”. (2) (- not just in the Midtown island)
	“key to high ridership is frequent service and exclusive rights-of-way to make transit trips time competitive with autos”. (2)
	“transit networks must be well integrated with walking, biking, and other forms of micro-mobility to solve the “last-mile” question of how people will get to their final destination.” (2)

What has been planned	Best practices that would make Midtown Oakville
Human scale and liveability	
Inhuman scale tall towers. Isolating vertical sprawl,	Low and mid-rise “villages” as an alternate TOD approach
Proven poor physical and mental health from tall towers environment	Low and mid-rise structures support interaction and sense of connected community
Connected to the sky, not the community	Suitable social scale - people know each other - sense of belonging
A plan that does not distinguish itself from other tower developments or compel people to choose to live there.	“the intermingling of residential, commercial, civic services, and workplace opportunities — guarantees access to amenities and services that are close to where people live” (2)
6 lane roads (Cross) - add another major artery in a constrained space; hard to cross for elderly.	Lower density aligned to restricted access location, between QEW, Railway, Creek, Shunting yards. Dense street and lane network: Safer - alternate routes for emergency vehicles Easier for pedestrians and older people to cross roads

What has been planned	Best practices that would make Midtown Oakville
Mixed use livable neighbourhood	
700 sq. ft apartments (or even less) the default	“Enable the availability and accessibility of a wide range of housing, jobs and community resources to meet the diverse needs of the community through all stages of life” (2)
	Mixed use, mixed users, mixed income, age groups etc.
Multi-generation families in 1 - 2 bedroom condos.	“Achieving complete life-cycle neighborhoods include mixing social housing, affordable rental, first-time low-cost home ownership, larger family housing, empty nester condos, and senior housing. The challenge is that each is produced and marketed by specialists with differing financing, zoning and construction types. Appropriate planning, financing, inclusionary requirements, and organic building opportunities can support integrating differing incomes and age groups”. (2)
Affordability not addressed	Protected MTSA
Statement by Jacobs that planners will do deals wth developers to enable them to add affordable housing in exchange for less parking spots etc.	“Integrate affordable and senior housing in each neighborhood At least 20% of housing in a neighborhood should be affordable”. (2)

What has been planned	Best practices that would make Midtown Oakville
Environment and Climate Change	
<p>Environment is largely ignored in the proposal and environment effectively vandalized; Over 80 Concrete and Steel tall towers; large wide roads.</p>	<p>Low-mid rise wood structures. Can build 20 storeys of wood - many examples. Wood building has stored carbon for 500 years (e.g.: Kings College Cambridge roof). <i>Source: Professor Michael Ramage, Head of Materials Innovation, Cambridge University</i></p> <p>Whereas Oakville plans to demolish the concrete library and pool after only 50 years.</p>
<p>“The problem with these incredibly useful materials is that producing steel and cement (the active ingredient in concrete) causes about 10% of mankind's greenhouse gas emissions” <i>Source: Institute of Structural Engineers</i></p>	<p>Local builders, building low and mid-rise wood structures: not specialized national builders of tall towers in concrete and steel. .</p>

What has been planned	Best practices that would make Midtown Oakville
Finance	
Financial costs for parks and community services not addressed	<p>“Based on planning and development costs studies, a 30% reduction in roadway infrastructure costs is realized due to savings from pavement, curbs, drainage, streetlights, and trees for dense urban networks in contrast to superblocks.” (2)</p> <p>More sidewalks, more retail space</p> <p>More interesting, vibrant</p> <p>Finance in smaller phases</p>
	<p>Transit finance is critical and needs to be planned as the priority in the next few years.</p>

Many comments: where is the budget??

What has been planned	Best practices that would make Midtown Oakville
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Process	
<p>Process that does not seem to listen to the public, Treats public engagement as “tick the box events”; pays no heed to public concerns; e.g.: Inaccurate summary of Feb 15 workshop comment sheets.</p>	<p>Open and transparent review of all options for density and building form across all of Oakville.</p> <p>Follow the seven principles of “Ending Global Sprawl: Urban Standards for Sustainable and Resilient Development” by Peter Calthorpe of HDR Calthorpe Associates for the World Bank’s Global Platform for Sustainable Cities (GPSC).</p>
<p>Misleading tables of growth allocation by area - lack of critical density information; Numbers and assumptions do not make sense when considering density and access issues for midtown; Maybe don’t make sense for other growth areas in Oakville either The more scrutiny, the more the numbers seem wrong</p>	
<p>“Public notification is not required for this report” Allocation of growth within Oakville not subject to review, with a massive impact town-wide; An approach that seems designed to favour high density tall tower development. Refusal to consider alternatives</p>	<p>Astonishing that no public involvement was sought - a decision affecting the entire town for 30+ years.</p>
Transit and Finance not part of the OPA plan	Plan for Transit and all forms of transportation should be the foundation of an achievable OPA.
Public frustration, despair - a gulf between the public and planners. Squandering the opportunity to take the public with you,	<p>“Most get this - understand intrinsically what a great city should be; Affordable housing advocates; environmentalists; residents, politicians - can have common cause” (2)</p> <p>“The desire of people to get it right is there - we just have to get the planners on board and the politicians”. (2)</p>

A plea for change

The public community is very engaged

Huge gulf between public and planners

We need to avoid a scenario of prolonged public opposition and campaigns to stop what is proposed

Please:

1. Require Planners to revisit and revise how population growth and density is allocated across all areas of Oakville, this time with active public involvement..

2. If that “cannot be done” then please consider the use of an independent urban design consultant to conduct an independent review with involvement of Oakville RA’s of

- a) the JBPE allocation of population growth and densities across Oakville, and
- b) the viability of an alternative build form of low and mid-rise for MidTown. Report back to the Town and RA’s.

**Hopefully independent “arbitration” can help to bridge the gulf between public and planners.
“Hit Reset” and move forward together.**

**“Most people get this - they understand intrinsically
what a great city should be;**

**Affordable housing advocates; environmentalists;
residents, politicians - they find they all can have
common cause**

**“The desire of people to get it right is there - we just
have to get the planners on board and the politicians”.
(2)**

Sources:

- (1). Erick Villagomez: Professor, Landscape Architecture & Regional Planning department at University of British Columbia
- (2). Peter Calthorpe: “Ending Global Sprawl: Urban Standards for Sustainable and Resilient Development” by [Peter Calthorpe](#) of HDR | Calthorpe Associates for the World Bank’s Global Platform for Sustainable Cities (GPSC). Also Peter Calthorpe, TED talk.

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Transit, traffic, mobility, access

Support.

2 comments: Robust active transport - I can live and save \$\$\$. Pedestrian safety of bridges.

I wish: 38 comments: Increased Safe active transport (bike) infrastructure; transit BRT, LRT; car sharing; connection to other areas; bus only lanes; Connection to Oakville Place; Access and bridge over 16 M creek. More bike parking. Car free streets. Walking bridge over QEW

Concerned: 73 Comments: Transport plan coming after OPA. Traffic and gridlock. Pollution. Choke point. Go train traffic. Lack of safe crossings for pedestrians.. No priority on transit, walk, bike. Only 4 exits and intersections. Bikes impractical in winter. Worse than Liberty Village gridlock. 6 lane Cross a mistake.

Planning process, targets, assumptions

Support: No comments.

I wish: 28 comments; Spread density further to Morrison, Maple Grove. Expand development 3rd line to Trafalgar Speers corridor. I wish there was a variety of options. Clarify height and density. Greater land area considered to accommodate province requirements. JBPE should be changed. Oakville Place were in scope to allow spread of growth. I wish OMG plan was considered.

Concerned: 40 comments: Wrong population target - who decided? Why Jacobs selected - can only do tall towers. Why are numbers so wrong and not spread. Why no Q&A? Not enough schools. No alternative presented. Consultant's have agenda and don't listen. Consultant presentations obscure. PPU numbers wrong.

Environment

Support: 1 comment: Increased green space

I wish: 14 comments: Increased green space. Focus on native plants; shade tree strategy. Standards to build for reduced GHG. Bird friendly windows.

Concerned: 40 comments: Tall towers most environmentally unfriendly form of building. Lack of wildlife corridor. Too much hardscape. Toxic land at Monsanto and Ferro and gas stations. Wind tunnels. Destruction of habitat. Air quality and noise.

Finance and cost.

Support: No comments.

I wish: 7 comments: I wish there was a budget for this.

Concerned: 10 comments: Finance after the plan is ridiculous. Why taxpayers pay for a plan they don't want? How much will taxpayers pay now developer fees cut? How to ensure affordable housing? Cost of parking.

Liveability, affordability parks, schools, families

Support: No comments (most in this column were wishes)

I wish: 41 comments: Gardens; prefer big space, not fragmented parks. Athletic spaces, rinks; More parkland. Plans would include protected school sites. Playgrounds, dog parks, treed spaces. Affordable housing (not in the plan yet) and diverse heights. Affordable for renters near schools, transit. Mixed use neighbourhoods. Parkland easy access - no need to drive. Walkable shopping precincts. Places to live for ALL ages. Don't warehouse people without amenities. How to attract economic racial, cultural, familial diversity to midtown.

Concerned: 55 comments. Liberty village dog park problem. Schools sharing parks with public instead of own fields; safety issue. Not enough park space for planned population. How can town pay for parkland - we don't have it now. Needs of children largely ignored. Where is the affordability? Lack of family orientation - schools, playgrounds, public services. Not enough schools. 700 sq. ft box to maximize profits. Unaffordable now - future worse. Tall towers not liveable. No phasing of schools for population in 2031. No plan for health services, hospital hard to access. Will be over-busy no open space like Mississauga. Repeating England mistake when they built towers in the 1960's. Warehousing people without amenities. Air BnB and drug traps.