



November 19, 2015

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Re: 6009 to 6017 Quinpool Road, Halifax
Planning Case #: 18966

Dear Mr. Purvis,

On June 10, 2014, Council directed staff to initiate the process to amend the Halifax Municipal Planning Strategy and the Land Use By-law for the subject site to enable a mixed use development by development agreement subject to addressing the design control principles for building height, mass, density, shadowing, and spacing between towers.

The following describes our design control measures in response to concerns raised by Staff in their initiation report for Case # 18966:

Concerns related to massing, bulk and density:

“... while increased population within the Regional Centre is a key goal of the Regional MPS, the construction of a well-designed building on a landmark site such as this must also play a key role in the decision making process. An overall assessment of the public benefit would occur should Council initiate this MPS amendment process following negotiations on enhanced design controls (setback, separation distances, etc.), broader unit mix (3 bedroom units), and other benefits as appropriate through the Development Agreement process.”

Right from the onset, our team recognised the symbolic significance of this location being a gateway site that is highly visible and overlooking a prominent public open space, the Halifax

Commons. The redevelopment of this site will help shape the image and character of this area, and thus we felt the obligation to meet the highest possible standards in design, form and material quality.

The following key improvements were introduced to the initial design concept that formed part of the initiation report to Halifax Council:

- Fully glazed commercial uses at grade to maximize visual transparency and enhance the pedestrian environment through the animation of storefronts;
- Special attention was given to the street wall heights at all 3 street frontages (Robie, Quinpool, and Windsor) to ensure a comfortable human-scaled street enclosure through articulating vertical volumes that is consistent with the prevailing character of narrow buildings along Parker St, and the narrow storefronts along Quinpool Rd.
- To ensure the highest quality of architectural expression at the corner of Robie and Quinpool, we have introduced a unique built feature that acknowledges the building's prominence on the street in terms of views and architectural presence. The modern ornamentation of the street wall through the Willow Tree mural will enhance the public's experience and give the building a sense of place and identity.
- Weather protection for pedestrians through the use of well integrated building overhangs and recesses.

Further to the above, Staff has asked us to consider the highly used bus stop on Robie Street. Consequently, our team saw an opportunity for an added public benefit and incorporated a well-integrated bus stop as part our design, with enhanced weather protection and seating. To accommodate this public benefit, we had to reduce the commercial leasable area by 100 square feet.

Concerns related to shadows:

***"... While increased density on the subject site has the potential to add vibrancy to the adjacent public space through the addition of residential uses, this desire must be carefully balanced with a more fundamental goal of ensuring public spaces are not negatively impacted by redevelopment.
In the case of the Quinpool Road Application, the proposal has been assessed to be of a low to no impact during the summer and fall seasons which are critical times of the year for maintenance of the field area."***

We concur with Staff's assessment on shadows. Our Shadow assessment findings do support this position.

Concerns related to spacing between Towers:

“... In the case of the Quinpool Road application, the development proposes a distance of 11.8 metres between the two residential towers internal to the site, and a setback distance of approximately 5.75 metres between the tower at the corner of Robie Street and Quinpool Road, and the property line to the north.

... Staff recommends that the proposed building meet a minimum distance of 11.5m between a tower and a shared property line.”

In response to concerns related to spacing between towers, we have opted to proceed with a one tower option versus two towers as initially proposed, which better reflects the prominence and profile of this corner. This approach provided the opportunity of increased setbacks from the property lines and the proposed tower on the adjacent property to the north. Other improvements include:

- Better orientation and placement of the tower;
- Large animated public and private terraces;
- High level of building articulation and design by means of step backs, vertical breaks in the façade, recessed balconies, and changes in material, texture, and colour.

Concerns related to height:

“... it has been evaluated that additional height in the form of a landmark building on the Quinpool Road site, ... is worthy of further analysis and community consultation.

... furthermore, given that the Quinpool Road site is already designated as commercial within the SMPS, a taller development could be expected. A general urban design principle is that the wider the street, the taller that a building can be without appearing imposing. Given the substantial width of Robie Street, in addition to the presence of open space on its eastern side, it would be appropriate to consider this site as an opportunity for increased heights relative to the shorter buildings further west on Quinpool Road.

... The appropriate heights of both of these sites would be further evaluated throughout the course of the planning application process should Council choose to initiate these proposed policy and LUB amendments.”

We are proposing a building height of 28 floors plus a penthouse. We believe that this height is merited and necessary to respond to the uniqueness of the subject site. When assessing the appropriate height, one cannot look at it in isolation, but rather as an interconnected function of design, form, economics and public benefit.

Height as a function of Urban Design:

The site, by virtue of its location in both the immediate and the greater context of the city serves as a prominent civic node and gateway to the Quinpool commercial district. In addition, the site’s corner location, visibility, and relationship to the Halifax Commons presents a clear

and combined opportunity for a new civic landmark and an active destination point. To enhance the civic distinction of this corner, exceptions to height restrictions should be permitted to encourage increased massing and design excellence that accentuate the visual prominence as a greater (and higher) focal point in relation to surrounding and proposed towers along Robie Street. Upon assessing the greater civic block along Robie that is bound by the commons (Quinpool to Cunard), the site, and the proposed height can be regarded as the civic 'bookend', where greater height is warranted to anchor the accumulative built forms along Robbie Street

Height as a function of Architectural Form:

We understand that our proposed height has increased 6 floors plus a penthouse level from what was included at the time of application. However, our approach of a single tower versus two, provides a far improved built form; one which relates better to:

- Streetscape via increased tower stepbacks, variations to street wall height relating to existing context, and increased areas allocated for outdoor amenity/terraces
- Public spaces via a narrower tower to minimize the visual and shadow impact upon the commons.
- Setbacks via increasing the distance of the tower between adjacent uses, and solidifying the tower footprint in a location that is furthest away from low-rise buildings in the immediate context.

The single tower option of 28 storeys is comparable in gross floor area with the initially proposed 2 towers option (22 storeys and 11 storeys). As a result of consolidating the gross areas into one narrow tower to accommodate for the improved benefits listed above, an increase in height was rationalised and foreseeable for proposed development.

Height as a function of Economics:

When considering the redevelopment of the subject site, one must take into account the value of the existing real estate in addition to construction costs. This includes a 10-storey building with 50,000 SF of office space and a 4-storey parking structure that accommodates 100 cars. The value of the existing investment in addition to demolition and disposal costs falls in the range of 11 million dollars; a significant economic factor in the overall feasibility of such landmark civic building with added architectural value.

Height as a function of Public Benefit:

APL is a community partner that understands the social responsibility and the value of giving back to the community. Through the proposed Willow Tree development they are committing to the following significant public benefit component:

- IWK Family Centre: APL has been in discussions with the IWK, and has come to an agreement to provide the Health Centre with 8000 square feet of space on the second floor. The objective is to accommodate a much needed short term and long term stay options for families of patient's at the IWK. The short-term stay area will feature a large

open common space with a family room, a common kitchen and several smaller contained rooms. The Long-term stay area will feature individual 2 and 3 bedroom units with kitchens. Management of the program will be through the IWK or an associated non-profit organization.

- Willow Tree Mural: This substantial ornamental feature spans 6 storeys, and is implemented to accentuate the prominence of this corner and strengthen the sense of civic pride in the form of public art that is integrated with the building design.
- Robie St Bus Stop: the building footprint at grade towards the northern corner of the property has been set back to accommodate weather protection and seating for the current unprotected bus stop. The setback also creates a larger side walk an increased special buffer for transit commuters from the active sidewalk. To accommodate this public benefit, a compromise and reduction of 100 SF of prime commercial place along Robie Street was implemented.

In Summary, we would like to reiterate and acknowledge that overall building height is in direct correlation with multiple factors and variables that ultimately define and dictate architecture. Design, form, economics, streetscape, materiality, and sociocultural parameters all play a pivotal role in the built form and mass of any building. Our proposed 28 storeys plus a penthouse is a result of our professional analysis of all factors overlaid on this unique civic site.

We thank you for your collaboration and continued support on this exciting project. We trust that the enclosed is sufficient to move forward with the planning approval process.

Sincerely,



Cesar Saleh, P.Eng.

W. M. Fares Architects

Attachment A: Initial design concept that formed part of Staff's Initiation Report

Attachment B: Revised design concept and renderings.