

URBAN DESIGN TASK FORCE
MINUTES

December 5, 2007

PRESENT:

Ms. Dale Godsoe, Chair
Mr. Paul MacKinnon, Vice-Chair
Mr. Bill Hyde
Mr. Stephen Terauds
Mr. Bernie Smith
Ms. Margot Young
Mr. Kendall Taylor
Mr. Frank Palermo
Mr. Paul Shakotko
Mr. David Garrett
Mr. Kevin Riles
Ms. Cathy Carmody
Councillor Jim Smith
Councillor Dawn Sloane

REGRETS:

Councillor Mary Wile
Ms. Linda Garber
Ms. Adriane Abbott

STAFF:

Mr. Andy Fillmore, Project Manager, Capital District
Mr. Steve Higgins, Project Implementation Coordinator, Capital District
Ms. Jacqueline Hamilton, Manager, Capital District
Mr. Austin French, Manager, Planning Services
Mr. Richard Harvey, Senior Planner, Planning Applications
Ms. Tiffany Chase, Communications Specialist, Heritage and Urban Design, Capital District
Ms. Melody Campbell, Legislative Assistant
Ms. Sandra Riley, Legislative Assistant

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1. CALL TO ORDER

The Chair called the meeting to order at 12:07 pm in Halifax Hall, City Hall.

2. APPROVAL OF MINUTES - October 17, 2007 and November 7, 2007

Change Kevin Rile's name on the minutes of November 7, 2007.

MOVED by Mr. Smith, seconded by Mr. Palermo, that the minutes of October 17, 2007 and November 7, 2007, as amended, be approved. MOTION PUT AND PASSED.

3. APPROVAL OF THE ORDER OF BUSINESS AND APPROVAL OF ADDITIONS AND DELETIONS

Ms. Godsoe requested that the order of business be changed to move Correspondence to the beginning of the meeting.

MOVED by Mr. Smith, seconded by Mr. Palermo, that the Order of Business, as amended, be approved. MOTION PUT AND PASSED.

4. BUSINESS ARISING OUT OF THE MINUTES - NONE

5. CONSIDERATION OF DEFERRED BUSINESS - NONE

6. NEW BUSINESS

6.1 Forum 4 Debriefing

Ms. Godsoe commented how wonderful it is to be involved in something where there are so many people who care so passionately and have such a love of Halifax and civic life.

Ms. Godsoe stated the need to have the next meeting of December 19 and then operate the work plan. Meetings are a continuum and without completing the discussion they would not have the right Critical Path. She stated that over these two meetings:

- The committee needs to debrief and outline major areas of clarification of consideration analysis and action.
- Figure out what the road map is ahead.
- Develop implementation phase for the downtown.
- List critical issues for rigorous exploration and analysis for the downtown in particular and how these apply as well as others in the whole regional centre dialogue.

Ms. Godsoe expressed the need to get advice from staff and consultants on:

- The Critical Path of meetings and what issues need exploring.
- How to elicit more informal explicit responses from the right stakeholders.
- Issues include: Sustainability, transportation, affordability -- many neighbourhood issues.
- Do with a 'can do' attitude and adjust later, in opposed to always having to get everything right first.
- A public information forum will be held some time in March.

Mr. MacKinnon addressed the meeting making the following comments re-capping the forum:

- Attendance was phenomenal in Forum 4 and Forum 4B .
- Some members of the public were upset while some love what is being done.
- The forum lasted for four and a half hours. Presentations were an hour. Most people were disappointed as not a lot of new information was presented to the public. Issues were polarized. It was unfortunate that very few members of the public stood up to say what they thought about the plan and what it meant to them.
- Not allowing developers enough flexibility to make their own choices. Not allowing for the right pitch capacity; the right form of capacity.
- Residents are concerned about heritage, particularly the Morris Street area.
- Need to encourage environmental design.
- Transportation -There are concerns about road widening.
- Deferred plan has elements Heritage group does not like and/or development groups are not going to like. Does not have a good sense of how general public feels.

Ms. Godsoe inquired as to what the reaction in the room was.

Mr. MacKinnon commented there was applause but it was hard to discern like or dislike. The presenters were great: Mr. Fillmore, Ms. Keesmatt and Mr. Madi, in particular. Lot of speaking up until 5:55pm . The Committee would like to have more input prior to the next public presentation.

Mr. Smith expressed that he felt the presentation was fine, noting the following:

- Carmichael street shows the actual angle and it is an embarrassing shot.
- Should do public forum and solicit written comments.
- Mr. MacKinnon was concerned about Schmidville and other areas where height has been cranked up too much. Stated Area 3 was up to 12 storeys and regretted the cranking up in Area 2 that is now up to 80 feet. He would like to see in-fill in the city and does not want to see a city that is not uniform.
- Predicts public will begin to engage in trade -off situations.

- There should be some sort of review process. Suggested a break of any construction at about the 4th floor level and some sort of setback; a formula that tries to get light in the area of the street.
- A 'walking city' is a good vision to pursue.
- As several members of the public mentioned the LEED building codes, he suggested it should be made a part of development requirements.
- The pressure for larger buildings may be illusory. It is possible to add to the street by being smaller. As the area is a mall block situation, it is difficult to build anything bigger while assuring it is still appealing to the general feel of downtown.

Ms. Godsoe expressed concern that big buildings will not fill in the broken teeth because there is not sufficient capacity.

Ms. Carmody agreed with Mr. MacKinnon's opinion and elaborated on her own concerns as follows:

- Members of the public were not given enough information or the information they had was too complex while some were just not fully listening.
- She would like a vibrant city with more people living and working downtown, more walk-ability, and would like Halifax to be appraised for affordable housing, and senior housing, not for a bunch of high buildings.
- To attract business people, so many million square feet of floor space is needed. As more knowledge of demand means a better feel for what needs to be built, she suggested talking to financial companies in order to specify the actual demand, and to gauge whether it can be done without building high buildings.
- According to Heritage Trust, really tall buildings are not a necessity for density.
- It is possible to keep history and heritage while adding new buildings that blend in.

Ms. Godsoe requested clarification of Ms. Carmody's statement of certain amount of non-listening occurring.

Ms. Carmody remarked she works with groups and noticed that most people do not listen as well as they should. It is human nature to have internal conversations, figuring how it affects yourself, while readying yourself for your turn to speak and not fully paying attention.

Mr. Shakotko stated he tried to get a sense of what was going on:

- Members of the public were very energetic and applause came easily.
- Agreed with Ms. Carmody in the public's lack of understanding and giving full attention.
- He was ecstatic about the number of people and the average age, giving it a young family feel.
- The high-jacking of the entrance way with the Heritage Trust posters was surprising. Interested parties should bring more stuff in and have a place for it and have their items labelled.

- The committee needs to address the difference between Urban Design and Urban Planning. Ms. Godsoe concurs that it is a very important distinction.
- The Jack presentation last week seemed to fall flat and did not resonate with the Nova Scotia audience as it was better suited to much bigger urban centres like Toronto or Vancouver.

Mr. Shakotko added that the presentation needed other people up on stage. He noted that the audience responds to Mr. MacKinnon and Mr. Fillmore very differently than to other speakers. He suggested fireside chats every Wednesday night with anyone from the public. He stressed the need for more clarification.

Mr. Garrett stated he had difficulty with the meeting and felt uncomfortable with various things at various times.

- The presentation seemed to go on unnecessarily long with too much information offered in the meetings.
- The format of the forums has a purpose in getting information out and feedback and discussions are absolutely necessary.
- Height Framework is a big concern and details have to be looked at carefully.
- Development projection needs, desires, and ambitions, in terms of densification of downtown, are larger issues to consider.
- Built Form guidelines go hand and hand with Framework and a lot more clarity is needed about that.

Mr. Taylor agreed with Mr. Smith regarding the trade-off issues. He also stated a few more items:

- There was very animated applause which suggested a lot of silent support in the room. He expressed disappointment that the supporters did not get up and speak.
- Morris Street area needs more focus.
- The agenda is a planet issue and groups with their own agendas need to work together.
- Recent statistics show 13,500 more people live in the HRM but 5,000 have left NS. It is going to be harder to keep youth here as development moves forward.

Ms. Godsoe added that people do not automatically assume it is a good thing to increase density and that Halifax is not aware like other major cities.

Councillor Smith observed :

- People zoom in on height.
- Giving thought to the Built Form layers during the presentation, he wondered whether the ordinary citizen was understanding what was being presented.
- Suggested engaging members of the public in small discussions or public meetings to get everyone out.
- There are building plans that already have approval and not being built.

- Stated that the committee is doing a good job.
- It is important to discuss Critical Path in the next meeting.

Ms. Young added the following:

- A big part of the objective is to respond appropriately to demand, so a way to figure out demand must be found.
- The plan has to build strong economical values. She stated that building downtown should be structured for the solid pieces that the downtown is built upon and should not follow fads. The focus must remain on value.
- The social and environmental overlays need to be done and, afterwards, the heritage piece can be pulled out and necessary changes made.
- The Environmental agenda is a planning issue as it is how buildings interact with each other. There has not been enough provincial involvement.
- The plans have to incorporate social agendas so that the public can afford them. Affordability is a real thing as there are models of it being done before.

Mr. Palermo offered that he went away from the meeting a bit confused because of the images that were being presented. He stated the problems as such:

- The plan was too complicated and he had never seen such a small area presented as four different kinds of overlays. There were too many different districts on a small piece of real estate. He suggested talking to some of the heritage groups to find out what it is they really want.
- From a development point of view, to accommodate as much floor space as desired, the development should be spread out in a larger area. He suggested building in conjunction with new things that are going on in Canada. He remarked that higher intensity buildings are against the creation of street scapes and suggested a density limit in the downtown. He predicted that a few points will have marvellous spots and the landscape in between will be desolate.
- The environmental issues are not optional.
- An aggressive forward look should be taken at the transit issue.

Mr. Hyde reiterated the concerns expressed in his email of December 04, 2007. He liked the presentation, with the exception of the slide showing the form overlays. The public needs more time to understand how it will work. In addition, he stated:

- Mike Hanusiak's question about flexibility in maximum heights caused some concern. He agreed with Mr. Smith on the height issues.
- He stressed the need to make the plans as simple as possible with a summary that condenses to make the public understand.
- The public did not like Jack's story. The concern is that the focus was on a community that was not going to be a unique Halifax but another Vancouver or Toronto. The public wants Halifax and the plan needs to fit in to their expectations.

Mr. Terauds expressed a few comments as follows:

- The consensus of those he spoke to appreciated the intent of Jack's story but could not relate to it.
- The public stated general agreement for where development is headed although not understanding all the specifics.
- Agreed that height is given too much importance. Built Form Frameworks are crucial and the most important thing. Height is a proposed maximum. The plans need to ensure that anything that gets built in the target area is going to give the vitality desired regardless of height. There has to be clear targets, so it is important to develop measuring tools. Even a 3-storey building has to achieve what is wanted.

Mr. Riles stated that the committee is doing a great job. He offered these comments:

- The process needs to be simplified.
- HRM does not have enough people in the downtown area and should forget the office space and try to bring more people by addressing affordability. He quoted \$215,000 as the average house price whereas you could purchase a 700 square foot condo in Toronto for \$160,000-\$180,000.
- The 7-storey caps can not be put on everything.
- The mandate of the group must be to look at the science; the issues of environmental responsibility, transportation, and affordability. Every policy introduced has a financial implication to development.
- When buying an existing building, most of them have to be demolished.
- He is comfortable where things are moving.

Councillor Sloane stated she would like to applaud all the speakers. Additional points noted by Councillor Sloane are as follows:

- The committee needs to figure out a balance for the forums in whether people are allowed to speak or not, as the format did change because of input.
- Regarding the issue of Heritage Trust being allowed to put their banners inside meeting hall - it should be worked out ahead of time.
- A refresher course should be offered prior to public meetings so people are not leaving because they have heard it before.
- Because people have different degrees, the presentations should show four families from four different communities downtown, as there are more than just 'Jacks' around.
- On the height versus quality issues, she suggested the plans need to push quality as a reference. Talk about the Built Form.
- Misinformation has to be turned into re-information.
- Development time has to be nailed down.
- The committee needs to further discuss the renewal of Cogswell.
- The demand for affordability must include all age groups and family dynamics.
- Mike Hanusiak's question about the development agreement was a good question for the committee.

- Social and environmental issues must also be addressed.

Mr. Fillmore added that the voices at the microphone were not necessarily the voices of the entire room and that there was great support. Mr. Fillmore had further comments:

- The dominance of height is a difficult issue but is not the only thing of importance.
- The capacity figures are representing a range in the high end.
- Because downtown is incredibly complex, to go backward to re-examine instead of moving forward, would be highly detrimental to the project.
- The planners will take a hard look at how to accomplish metrics for vibrancy and livability through health and community guidelines.

Mr. French commented on market analysis.

- Existing policies have a lot of flexibility that are meant to be interpreted by a council.
- The proposal is to create something much more specific; more direct. Affordability may be possible with a variety of different districts.
- The mood of the audience for the vision was that it was well-received.

Ms. Hamilton encouraged the group to take the spirit of optimism from last weeks meeting. The community has a lot of confidence in this group. She stated that the onus is still on the Urban Design Task Force.

Mr. Higgins advised that it was time to move forward to the implementation phase, as the issues are now known, and that sustainability has to be worked into that phase. He added that he had spent most of the time outside as members of the public were leaving, and suggested that it was not frustration causing them to leave, as they were going out and returning.

Ms. Godsoe thanked Mr. Higgins for being a support for the committee.

Ms. Godsoe welcomed Mr. Richard Harvey to the group.

7 CORRESPONDENCE PETITIONS AND DELEGATIONS

7.1 Correspondence

Correspondence was received from the public as noted below. These were distributed to the UDTF.

- Mr. Philip Pacey

- Mr. Blair Beed
- Mr. Bill Hyde

Ms. Godsoe referenced Phil Pacey's letter requesting an opportunity to make a presentation to the committee. She responded that the committee will present to Mr. Pacey's board and welcome a presentation from him. Ms. Godsoe added that all public input is appreciated and welcome.

8 **ADDED ITEMS - NONE**

9 **NEXT REGULAR MEETING DATE**

The next regular meeting is scheduled for December 19, 2007 from 11:30 pm - 3:00 pm.

10 **ADJOURNMENT**

The meeting was adjourned at 2:30 pm.

Sandra Riley
Legislative Assistant