


Item No. 10.1.4
Halifax Regional Council
January 18, 2011

TO: Mayor Kelly and Members of Halifax Regional Council

SUBMITTED BY: Original Signed by 
Wayne Anstey, Acting Chief Administrative Officer

Original Signed by 
Mike Labrecque, Deputy Chief Administrative Officer

DATE: December 17, 2010

SUBJECT: Case 16417 – MPS & LUB Amendments for 6225-6233 Willow Street,
Halifax

ORIGIN

- Application by Michael Napier Architects for the lands of St. John's United Church.
- November 16, 2010 (Item 9.2.3) - Petition submitted by Councillor Sloane containing over 200 signatures from the members of the community surrounding the St. John's United Church requesting that Case 16417 - St. John's United Church Spirit Place Redevelopment Project proposal for Willow Street and Windsor Street, Halifax, be in keeping with the spirit of the current R-2 zoning.

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that Halifax Regional Council:

1. Authorize staff to initiate a process to consider amending the Halifax Municipal Planning Strategy and Halifax Peninsula Land Use By-law to permit a 7 storey mixed use residential and institutional building at 6225-6233 Willow Street in Halifax, by development agreement.
2. Instruct that the Municipal Planning Strategy amendment process include a public participation program in accordance with the Public Participation Resolution adopted by Halifax Regional Council on February 25, 1997.

BACKGROUND

Location and Surrounding Context

The subject site is comprised of two properties located at the north-west corner of Windsor and Willow Streets in Halifax (see Map 1). Civic address 6225 Willow Street is currently occupied by the sanctuary of St. John's United Church, while civic address 6233 contains a house, which is currently being used as the administrative centre for the Church. Both parcels have a combined lot area of 23,318 square feet and a street frontage of approximately 245 feet along Willow Street, and 95 feet along Windsor Street. None of the properties have a heritage designation applied to them.

The immediate area surrounding the subject site consists mostly of residential house forms. However, the area also contains some low-rise multi-unit residential buildings, including a three storey apartment building directly abutting the site, some institutional uses, and some commercial establishments including a grocery store, a funeral home and a mixed use pharmacy/professional health centre.

Proposal

Michael Napier Architects has been retained by St. John's United Church to act on its behalf in applying to amend the Halifax Municipal Planning Strategy and the Halifax Peninsula Land Use By-law to establish a site-specific development agreement policy, which would allow for the consideration of a 7 storey mixed use residential/institutional building on the subject site. The proposed building, commonly referred to as Spirit Place, would contain the following uses:

- A new sanctuary space for St. John's United Church;
- Church administration offices;
- Community program space;
- 65 dwelling units, half of which would meet Provincial affordable housing program standards; and
- One level of underground parking containing 41 spaces.

Access to the underground parking is to occur off Windsor Street. The form of the proposed building is fully outlined in the attached drawings (Attachments A to E). The total height of the project would be approximately 72 feet.

Zoning

The two subject properties are currently zoned R-2 (General Residential) under the Halifax Peninsula Land Use By-law (see Map 1). Permitted uses in the R-2 Zone include the following:

- R-1 uses, including a church or church hall;
- Semi-detached or duplex dwelling;
- Buildings containing not more than four apartments; and,

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- Uses accessory to any of the foregoing uses.

The maximum building height in the R-2 Zone is limited to 35 feet, while lot coverage is limited to 35 percent. The required front and rear yard setbacks are 15 and 20 feet, respectively. Minimum lot frontage, lot area, and side yards for the various residential uses permitted in the R-2 Zone are contained in Table 1.

Table 1. Requirements for Lot Frontage, Lot Area and Side Yard Setbacks in the R-2 Zone

Use	Lot Frontage (Feet)	Lot Area (Sq. Feet)	Side Yard (Feet)
R-1 Uses	40	4000	4
Duplex	50	5000	5
3-unit and 4-unit Apartment Buildings	80	8000	6

The St. John's United Church was constructed between 1917-20 and is a non-conforming structure, not meeting many of the provisions of the land use by-law, including height and lot coverage, which are currently 60 feet and 57%, respectively.

As-of-right Development Options

Various residential development scenarios are possible under the current R-2 zoning. If the house on the smaller parcel existed prior to 1950, then it would be eligible for internal conversion into two units, as long as the height and the massing of the building did not change. The larger parcel could be subdivided into 6 lots, each containing single unit dwellings. Another option would be to subdivide the larger parcel into 4 lots each containing a duplex. Yet another option would be to subdivide the larger parcel into 3 lots, one containing a single dwelling unit, with the other two lots each containing a 3-4 unit residential building.

Designation

The two subject properties are currently designated Medium Density Residential (MDR) under the Halifax Municipal Planning Strategy (see Map 2). The MDR Designation limits uses to those found in the R-1 and R-2 zones. In addition, there are no policies in the Halifax MPS that would allow Council to consider the current proposal through the development agreement process. This application would therefore require Council to consider creating policies that would be different from many of the current Municipal Planning Strategy policies and Land Use By-law requirements that apply to this Designation and the R-2 Zone for this area of Peninsula Halifax.

Petition

This application has been the subject of a petition tabled with Regional Council on November 16, 2010. The petition, which contained 146 signatures, requested that the redevelopment of 6225-6233 Willow Street be in keeping with the spirit of the current R-2 zoning.

DISCUSSION

Rationale

This application proposes significant changes to many longstanding Municipal Planning Strategy policies and Land Use By-law regulations that relate to the subject site. The rationale for the changes is contained in a letter from St. John's United Church (Attachment F). In summary, the Church cites:

- A declining congregation;
- Aging and deteriorating church infrastructure;
- An ever expanding need for space for community outreach programs and services; and
- A growing demand for affordable senior housing options.

Analysis

When assessing a request to amend a municipal planning strategy, Council should consider if there has been a change in the circumstances from the time when the existing planning policies were originally devised. After careful review, staff is of the opinion that this is the case for St. John's United Church.

In general, regular church attendance rates have been falling in Canada over the past three decades. This has resulted in declining congregation sizes, especially in older established neighbourhoods like those found on Peninsula Halifax. This phenomenon, compounded with aging and deteriorating church infrastructure, has led many congregations to begin questioning their respective role in the community and even their continued existence. In HRM, many congregations have chosen to merge together with other likeminded congregations to share resources. This has inevitably led to the closure and sale of other church facilities for redevelopment purposes with St. Joseph's Church on Gottingen Street and St. Lawrence Church on Dutch Village Road being recent examples.¹

St. John's United Church members undertook a similar soul searching exercise over the past couple of years. However, the congregation decided against a merger or a retreat from the community. Instead, it has chosen to stay in place, albeit in a smaller church sanctuary. While St. John's has decided to reduce its sanctuary footprint in Northend Halifax, it does want to grow its community outreach programs and services. In addition it has decided to provide much needed affordable housing for seniors that want to continue to reside within the community.

The proposed mixed use institutional/residential building is not consistent with any current zoning under the Halifax Peninsula LUB. For example, the residential component would not comply with the R-3 (Multiple Dwelling) Zone standards for apartment buildings, as the proposal is deficient on angle controls (controls over setbacks and the height of buildings relative to property boundaries) and density requirements (number of persons per acre). However,

¹ Many of the redevelopment projects for former church sites have necessitated site-specific MPS amendments.

adopting specific policies for the subject properties and requiring that the project be approved by development agreement allows Council to recognize the individual attributes of the site and exercise a greater degree of control over the design of the project than what can be achieved with an as-of-right approval.

Staff Concerns

It is important to note that staff has some concern with the height of the proposed building, given that the immediate area consists primarily of low-rise and low-density house forms and that the full height would be greater than those of other buildings in the immediate area, including the existing church. The applicant has attempted to minimize the impact of this additional height by stepping down to abutting low-rise properties and by breaking up the massing of the building with variations in building form. Should Council decide to initiate the amendment process to further consider this application, the measure of success that the proposed building has in responding to its surroundings will be gauged through the public participation process and with further review and modification of the project as may be appropriate.

Conclusion

Regional Council should initiate a plan amendment process to receive public input and determine the merits of this proposal. As a Municipal Planning Strategy amendment is required to allow the building, Council has the discretion to approve or refuse it when it returns to Council with public input and additional information.

BUDGET IMPLICATIONS

The HRM costs associated with processing this planning application can be accommodated within the approved operating budget for C310 Planning & Applications.

FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT POLICIES/BUSINESS PLAN

This report complies with the Municipality's Multi-Year Financial Strategy, the approved Operating, Project and Reserve budgets, policies and procedures regarding withdrawals from the utilization of Project and Operating reserves, as well as any relevant legislation.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Amendments to the Halifax Municipal Planning Strategy involve community engagement and the engagement process will be consistent with the intent of the HRM Community Engagement Strategy, the *Halifax Regional Municipality Charter*, and the Public Participation Program approved by Council on February 25, 1997.

The proposed level of community engagement is consultation, achieved through a public meeting early in the review process, as well as a public hearing before Regional Council can consider approval of any amendments.

The proposed application to amend the Halifax Municipal Planning Strategy and the Halifax Peninsula Land Use by-law to enable a seven storey mixed use residential and institutional development will potentially impact the following stakeholders: local residents, property owners, community and neighbourhood organizations, and other HRM business units or divisions.

ALTERNATIVES

1. Council may choose to initiate a process to consider amending the Halifax Municipal Planning Strategy and the Halifax Peninsula Land Use By-law to enable a site-specific development agreement. This is the staff recommendation.
2. Council may choose not to initiate amendments to the Halifax Municipal Planning Strategy and the Halifax Peninsula Land Use By-law, thereby retaining the as-of-right allowances of the R-2 (General Residential) Zone.

ATTACHMENTS

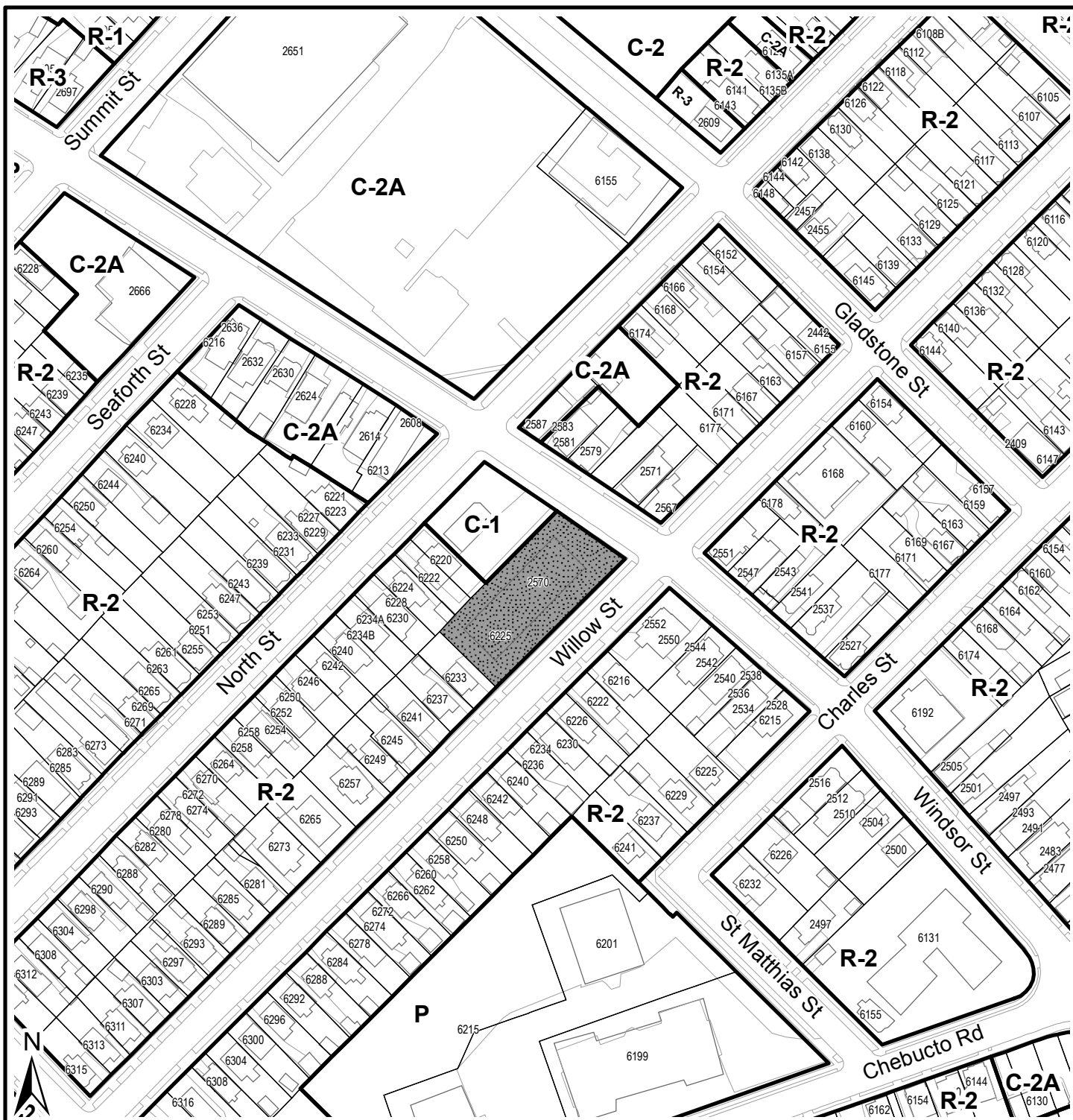
Map 1	Location and Zoning
Map 2	Generalized Future Land Use
Attachment A	Site Plan
Attachment B	Landscape Plan
Attachment C	South Elevation
Attachment D	East & West Elevations
Attachment E	North Elevation
Attachment F	Application Letter

A copy of this report can be obtained online at <http://www.halifax.ca/council/agendasc/agenda.html>, then choose the appropriate meeting date, or by contacting the Office of the Municipal Clerk at 490-4210, or Fax 490-4268.

Report Prepared by: Luc Ouellet, Senior Planner, 490-3689


Report Approved by: _____
Kelly Denty, Acting Manager of Planning Services, 490-6011

Report Approved by: _____
Paul Dunphy, Director of Community Development



Map 1 - Location and Zoning

6225 Willow Street
Halifax

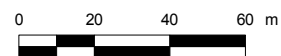
 Subject area

Halifax Peninsula
Land Use By-Law Area

Zone

R-1	Single Family Dwelling
R-2	General Residential
R-3	Multiple Dwelling
C-1	Local Business
C-2	General Business
C-2A	Minor Commercial
P	Park and Institutional

HALIFAX
REGIONAL MUNICIPALITY
COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT
PLANNING SERVICES



This map is an unofficial reproduction of a portion of the Zoning Map for the plan area indicated

HRM does not guarantee the accuracy of any representation on this plan.



Map 2 - Generalized Future Land Use

6225 Willow Street
Halifax



Subject area

Halifax Plan Area
Peninsula North Secondary Plan Area

Designation

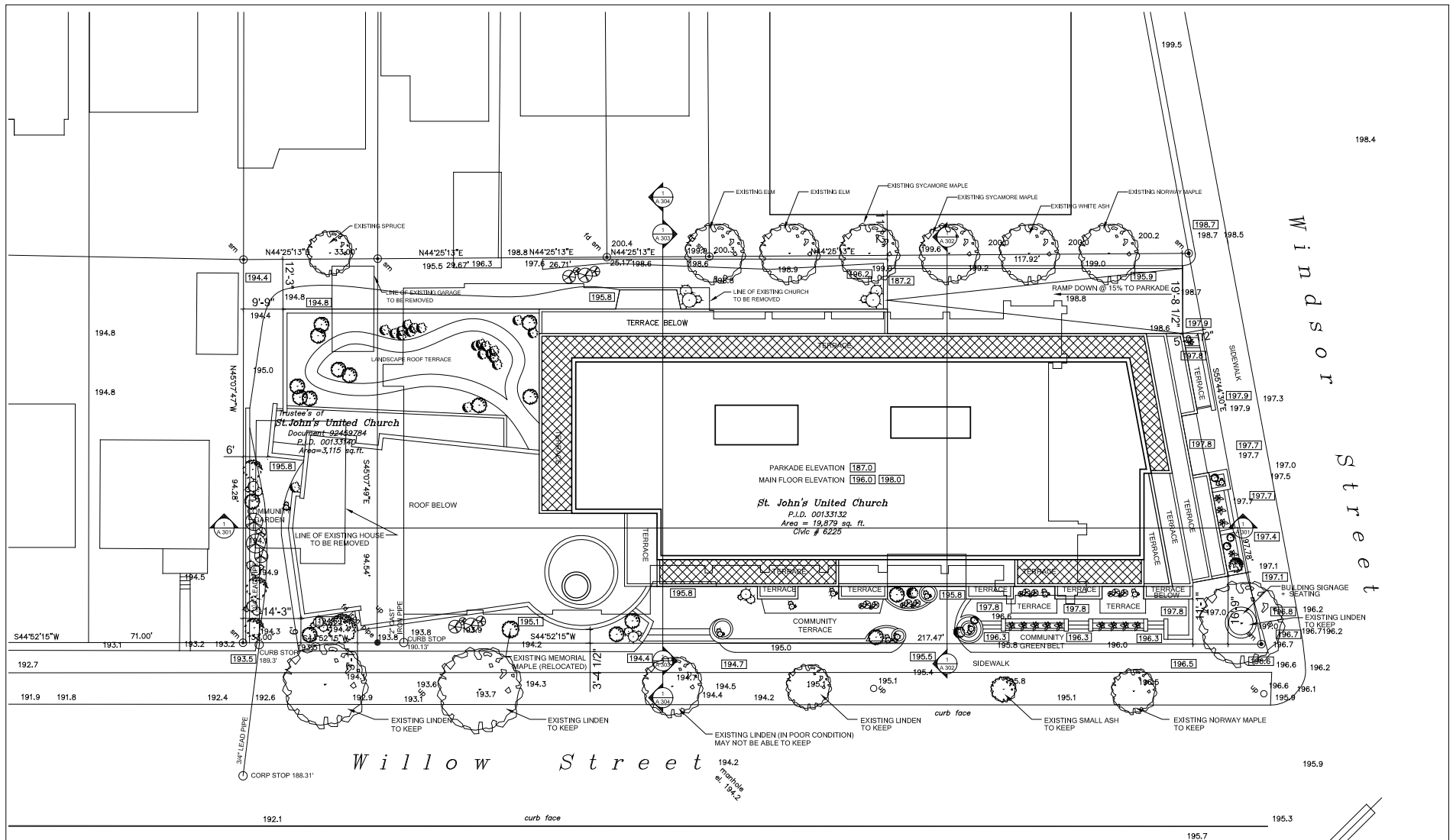
MDR Medium Density Residential
HDR High Density Residential
MNC Minor Commercial

HALIFAX
REGIONAL MUNICIPALITY
COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT
PLANNING SERVICES

0 20 m

This map is an unofficial reproduction of a portion of the Generalized Future Land Use Map for the plan area indicated.

HRM does not guarantee the accuracy of any representation on this plan.



LEGEND
 197.9 - PROPOSED ELEVATION
 197.9 - EXISTING ELEVATION

ST. JOHN'S REDEVELOPMENT PROJECT

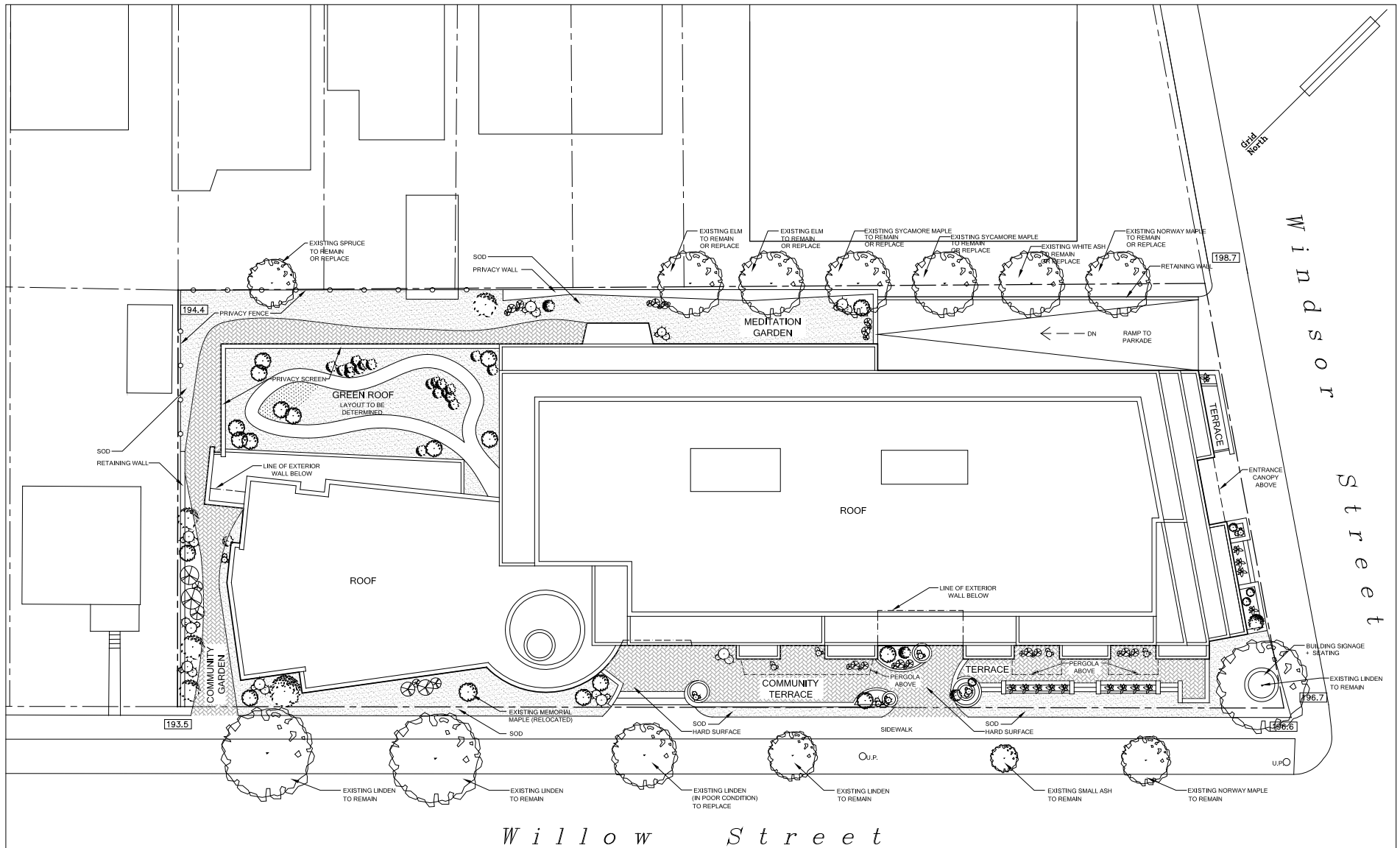
SPIRIT PLACE
 6233 WILLOW STREET
 HALIFAX, NOVA SCOTIA



REVISIONS		
NO.	REVISION NUMBER	D/M/Y
1	ISSUED FOR D.A. APPLICATION	06/07/10

DRAWING	SITE PLAN
SCALE	0 5 10 20 40 FEET

DATE	06 JULY 2010
DRAWING NO.	A-100



ST. JOHN'S REDEVELOPMENT PROJECT

SPRIT PLACE
6233 WILLOW STREET
HALIFAX, NOVA SCOTIA



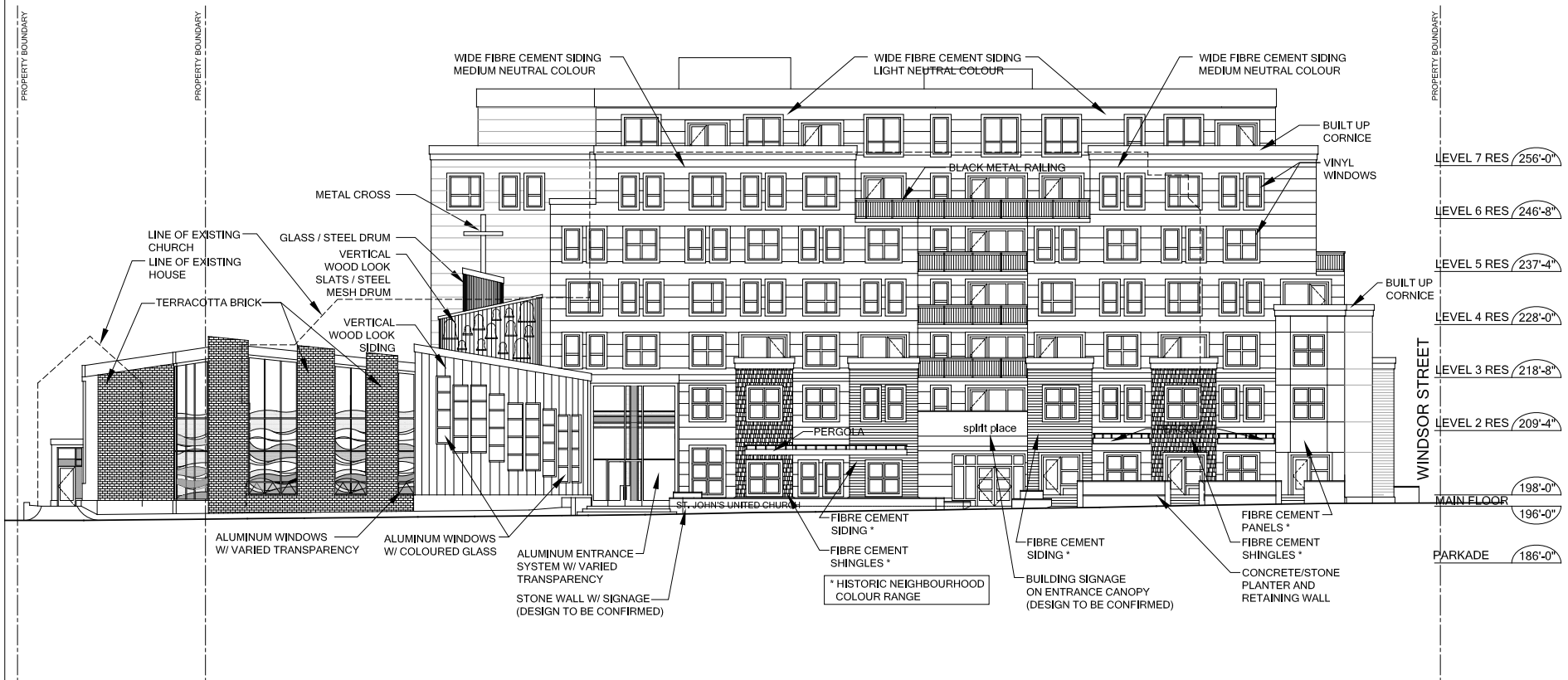
REVISIONS		
NO.	REVISION NUMBER	D/M/Y
1	ISSUED FOR D.A. APPLICATION	06/07/10

DRAWING
LANDSCAPE PLAN

SCALE
0 5 10 25
FEET

DATE
06 JULY 2010

DRAWING NO.
A-102



ST. JOHN'S REDEVELOPMENT PROJECT

SPIRIT PLACE
6233 WILLOW STREET
HALIFAX, NOVA SCOTIA

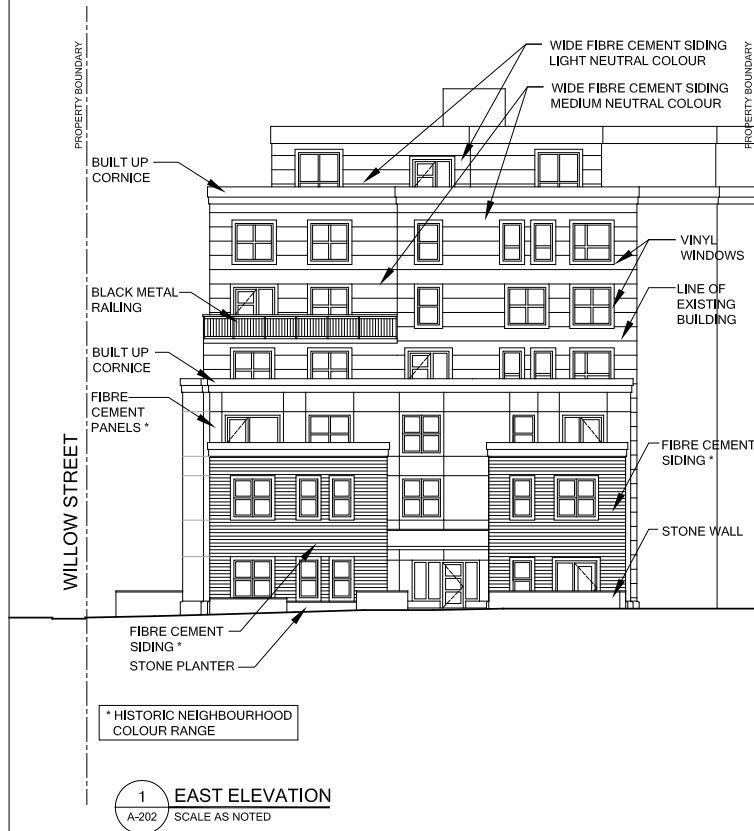


REVISIONS		
NO.	REVISION NUMBER	D/M/Y
1	ISSUED FOR D.A. APPLICATION	06/07/10

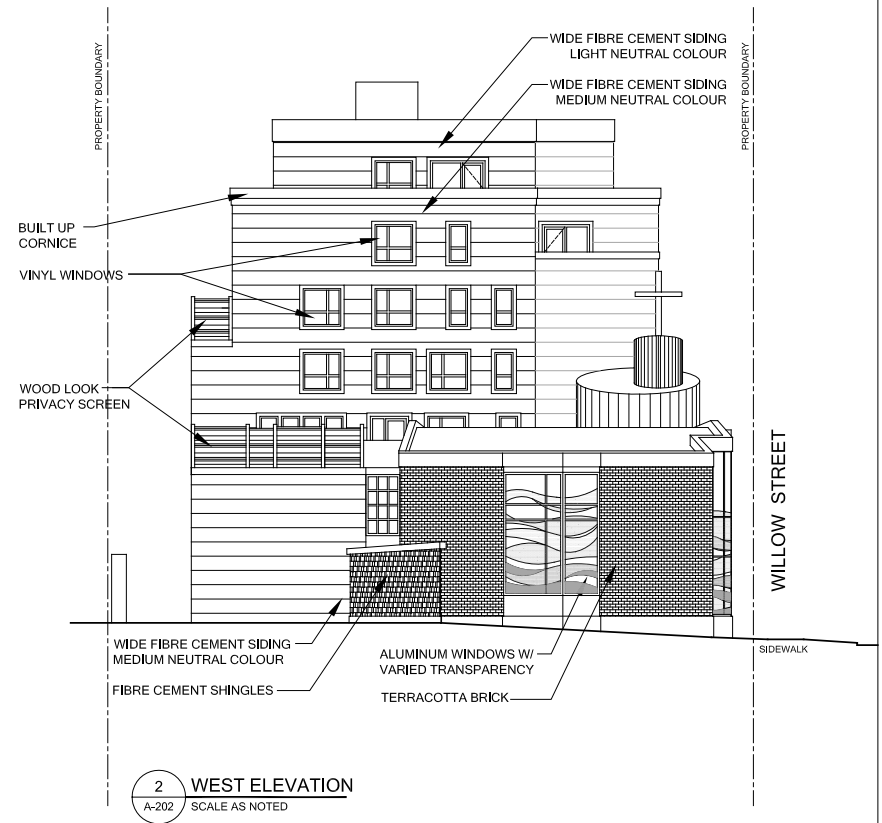
DRAWING
SOUTH ELEVATION
SCALE
0 5 10 25 FEET

DATE
06 JULY 2010

DRAWING NO.
A-201



LEVEL 7 RES	256'-0"
LEVEL 6 RES	246'-8"
LEVEL 5 RES	237'-4"
LEVEL 4 RES	228'-0"
LEVEL 3 RES	218'-8"
LEVEL 2 RES	209'-4"
MAIN FLOOR	198'-0"
	196'-0"
PARKADE	186'-0"



ST. JOHN'S REDEVELOPMENT PROJECT

SPIRIT PLACE
6233 WILLOW STREET
HALIFAX, NOVA SCOTIA



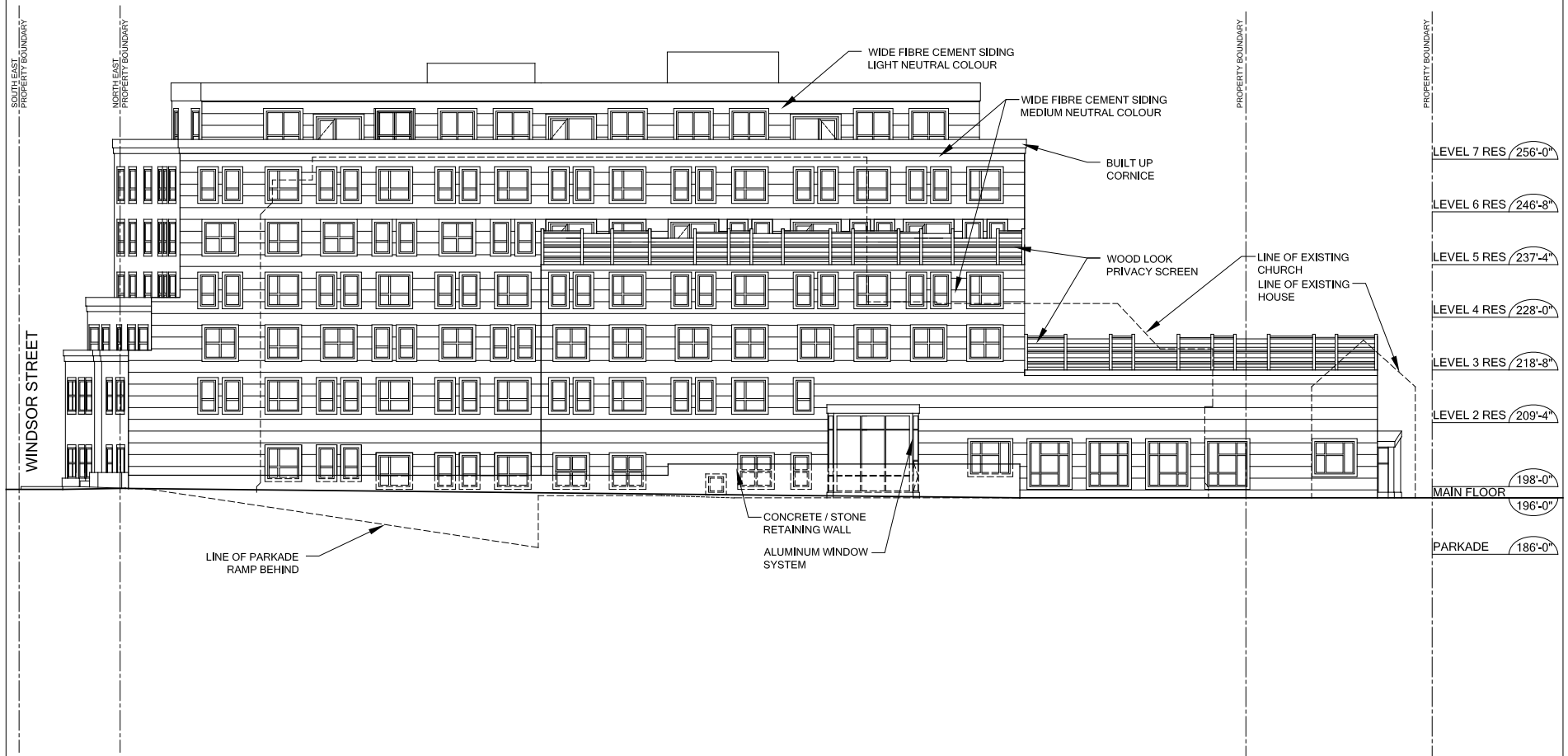
REVISIONS		
NO.	REVISION NUMBER	D/M/Y
1	ISSUED FOR D.A. APPLICATION	06/07/10

DRAWING
EAST & WEST
ELEVATIONS

SCALE
0 5 10 25
FEET

DATE
06 JULY 2010

DRAWING NO.
A-202



ST. JOHN'S REDEVELOPMENT PROJECT

SPRIT PLACE
6233 WILLOW STREET
HALIFAX, NOVA SCOTIA



REVISIONS		
NO.	REVISION NUMBER	D/M/Y
1	ISSUED FOR D.A. APPLICATION	06/07/10

DRAWING
NORTH ELEVATION

SCALE
0 5 10 25
FEET

DATE
06 JULY 2010

DRAWING NO.
A-203



St. John's United Church

6233 Willow Street, Halifax NS B3L 1P1

(902) 423-8498 Fax (902) 423-2966

Email: stjohnsunity@eastlink.ca

Website: www.stjohnsunity.com

Ministry Team:

Music: Ray Grant

Office Administration: Marilyn Peacock

Children/Youth: Alana Martin

Ordained: Rev. Linda Yates, M. Div.

Ms. Kelly Denty

HRM Planning Supervisor

West End Mall, Halifax, NS

06 July 2010

RE: Application for a Development Agreement

Dear Ms. Denty,

Please accept this letter as an indication of our intention to seek an amendment to the Municipal Planning Strategy for the redevelopment of 6225 and 6233 Willow Street.

In order to create the development agreement proposal which is enclosed, we have undertaken a process of community and congregational consultation to arrive at the best possible design, given the nature and intent of what we wish the building to portray and cognizant of community and neighbors' concerns. For your review, we have included two documents that describe both the project intent and how the proposed development responds to and respects regional planning guidelines through the development of a senior's hub.

St. John's United Church and the design team feel that this process of community involvement has successfully contributed to a redevelopment design for the site that reflects the concerns and wishes of the neighborhood, as well as realizing St. John's vision for our ministry, our community, and our future.

We look forward to our continued and expanding role in the community; a role that we have played for 93 years.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Brian Jay'.

Brian Jay

Team Leader, St. John's Redevelopment Implementation Team

St. John's United Church

Understanding the Church's Needs and the Proposed Redevelopment Project

In a time when family structures are changing and children are committed to many school and extracurricular activities, church attendance is waning. To keep a parish strong, churches must transform – they must offer continued spiritual guidance, as well as extend out into the community to find new ways to engage the public. This need to create an inclusive and welcoming space for the community can place considerable strain on the fiscal responsibilities of the church. Once again, churches must adapt. St. John's United Church is one of those parishes looking forward to change.



St. John's United has been playing an active and expanding role in peninsular Halifax for nearly 100 years, and sees an opportunity to continue to develop their message of SPIRIT by implementing the project outlined in their application for Development Agreement. This opportunity, however, will not come at a cost of compromising their mission, rather, it will further their reach into the community. St. John's is looking to create an affirming, welcoming space to live, gather, and worship for all types including seniors with moderate income, seniors belonging to the gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered (GLBT) community, children, families, the arts, and music.

In recent years the demand for diversity in senior housing options has seen extraordinary growth. Older adults are looking for options to be able to stay in their homes and out of long-term care facilities longer. It is also widely acknowledged that three plagues face seniors as they age: loneliness, helplessness and boredom. We can combat these issues by building an intergenerational, affirming complex, where all people are given choice and control of their environment and interactions. By welcoming a range of community members to this facility we provide a variety of opportunities – opportunities to watch or participate, to gather with friends or to enjoy solitude, and to live independently but within the security of a support network.

Sometimes the responsibilities of staying in one's own home are demanding physically, financially or both. Many seniors would like to stay in the communities which they have lived in, worked in, and built throughout their lifetime, however, with limited opportunities to do so it is not always possible. When a person makes the decision to leave their home it is often difficult to leave the community they are in as well. Breaking ties to one's community can lead to isolation from friends, support networks, social groups when the distance they must travel is increased in order to maintain their active lifestyle. By providing a supportive living environment that is close to amenities, public transit, doctor's offices, and grocery stores we can provide an opportunity to foster intergenerational communities and enrich lives.

This redevelopment project, which has the potential to be a role model for many other parishes, proposes a facility that will shelter both a new space for St. John's United Church, as well as, a rich living environment for seniors. While the immediate goal is to provide residential units on the

St. John's United Church – Spirit Place

Halifax, Nova Scotia

ground floor, the church envisions that in the future it may be advantageous to the tenants and the greater neighbourhood to offer these spaces as small scale commercial, fronting onto Windsor Street, available for lease by non-profit groups, furthering the reach of St. John's into the community by offering lower cost rental space to other socially minded groups. By providing an inspiring place to worship, affordable housing for seniors and a variety of outreach programs and services, this 'community hub' invites and supports social interaction between children, seniors, families and minority groups. Imagine a place where a senior can sit with a friend on a park bench and watch a family have a picnic or take a stroll through a garden feeling safe and secure. Imagine an elderly gay male, finding true friendship in a place where he is not judged and is free to live his life openly. Imagine a couple having the ability to stay in their home for years longer because of access to doctors, grocery or meal services, or help with the housework. Imagine a family having a place to gather and worship with friends and community, to contribute their talents for the good of others. This place is the new St. John's United.

The site for this project, bound on the east by Windsor Street and the south by Willow Street, is an ideal location for this mixed use re-development project. Its corner location makes it a hinge point between the bustling Windsor Street - which offers a number of health, professional and commercial services, and is well served by public transit – and Willow Street – which serves as a gateway to one of Halifax's beautiful tree-lined residential neighbourhoods.

At Windsor Street the building is set back +/-15 feet from the street, has two residential units at grade, and a central (secondary) entrance to the building. It continues up two stories at the same setback – in keeping with the existing 2-3 story street wall along Windsor Street – before stepping back 4 times to reach its height of +/- 72 feet (+/- 11 feet taller than the existing St. John's United). The total setback from the street at this height is +/- 21 feet which diminishes the mass of the building from Windsor Street while creating a variety of roof terraces for the residential units it houses.

Neighbourhood and congregational consultation suggested that maintaining a greenspace along Willow Street was important. To respond to this desire as the building turns the corner onto Willow Street, it steps back from the street +/- 29 feet offering terraced/landscaped entrances to the three at grade residential units, referring to the language of the surrounding residential porches. Continuing down Willow Street, the sidewalk opens to the side creating a generous path leading to the building's residential lobby. This entrance's location off the quieter Willow Street creates space for the resident's to gather on their way in or out of the building, offering the opportunity for social activity within the greater residential community.

Neighbourhood consultation also asked that the building respond to the scale and character of the residential homes in the area. To achieve this, the first two levels of the building step in and out +/- 3 feet creating an architectural rhythm to fit within Willow Street's existing streetscape. The residential portion of the Willow Street elevation continues to step back 3 times to reach a height of +/- 72 feet, creating visual variation and a series of rooftop terraces for the residential units above. The terraces that are created above the residential entrance provide an exterior extension to each level's generous interior common space. In addition to the multiple private and public terraces provided by stepping the building back, there is a generous landscaped roof terrace located over the church space on the north-west portion of the building accessed off the third floor fitness area.

Market research also indicated that there is currently a gap in the availability of high quality, affordably priced, enriched living opportunities for seniors in peninsular Halifax. Great care has been taken to design a residential facility that will serve this growing need and at rental rates that are below market rate for 50% (32) of the 65 units. Furthermore, St. John's has created a partnership with St. Vincent's Nursing Home to allow residents to access the wealth of

St. John's United Church – Spirit Place

Halifax, Nova Scotia

understanding and knowledge they hold to address the changing needs of the aging population and to keep seniors independent and vitally active in our communities for longer.

Important to the congregation was the provision of open outdoor greenspace for community and congregational gatherings, both formal and impromptu. For neighbours, they desired a buffer between the street and the building, maintaining a pedestrian friendly streetscape. To address these convergent needs, a landscaped community terrace parallel to the sidewalk connects the residential entrance to the main entrance for St. John's United. Located on the west end of the site where the original church was erected, St. John's United – with its outreach programs including a breakfast program for children in the area – is the heart of the project. Nestled within the arms of its residential community, the warm and spacious lobby with soft seating, fireplace and library and the adjoining protected meditation garden create a welcoming 'community living room' for the surrounding neighbourhood.

To create a sense of arrival and clearly demark the church space as separate from the residential portion of the building, the church entrance is visually marked by a concentric 'drum-like' bell tower element that veils the church's existing bells and is topped by the ubiquitous cross. Extending to the west of the drum is the church's sanctuary. Its pitched roof is +/- 31 feet at its highest point, sloping down to a height of +/-25 feet at the western property line. This location of the sanctuary, immediately adjacent to the neighbouring houses, allows the mass of the building to blend with the existing streetscape to the west before rising in height to achieve the project's 65 housing units.

The proposed project includes a below-ground parking garage that will accommodate 42 parking spaces. Neighbourhood consultation indicated that was preferred to keep vehicle traffic off Willow Street, and this was achieved by locating the entrance to the parkade from Windsor Street on the north-east corner of the site. St. John's is also exploring an opportunity for a car-share program to be housed in the parkade giving seniors (and neighbours) access to a car without the financial burden of owning or maintaining a vehicle while furthering their mission for environmental stewardship.

This project is able to meet St. John's United's goal to maintain the church's location and presence in Halifax's Windsor Street community; it responds to the need for affordable senior's housing on Halifax Peninsula and is able to provide it in an area that is close to amenities, public transit, doctor's offices, and grocery stores; is consistent with the Municipality's regional planning policies for densification within the Capital District and provides and provides an opportunity to foster intergenerational communities and enrich lives.

St. John's United Church has a vision that is unique. To achieve their goals they have engaged in multiple congregational and neighbourhood meetings which included workshops, open houses, information sessions, and presentations and have shown a willingness to listen to the needs, desires, and ideas these groups were able to offer. The process has been one of openness, exploration, discovery, respect, and engagement. With these ideals in place, St. John's hopes to embark on a new path and move confidently into the future.