

17 Witherspoon Street,  
Dundas, Ontario L9H 2C4  
June 3, 2019

Re: Item 8.3 June 4, 2019 Planning Committee agenda, 468-476 James Street North

Dear City Planning Committee:

If we as a city are to meet the growing and serious need for affordable housing in Hamilton, the city of Hamilton needs to act with all the flexibility it can and to strongly encourage innovative solutions. By affordable, I mean housing that costs less than 30 per cent of gross household income for the lowest 60 per cent of income earners—the definition in the city’s Housing and Homelessness Action Plan.

I know the city has made significant and important efforts to tackle the issue, so I’m not being critical. Yet key targets elude us. The city’s Official Plan and Housing and Homeless Action Plan goal of 300 new affordable units a year is not close to being met. Each year only about a third of that target has been achieved since the action plan was approved in 2013. The action plan set a goal of reducing the wait list for subsidized housing by 50 per cent by 2023. Yet the list has *grown* by 25 per cent, as rents keep rising and affordable units become harder to find.

JvN/d’s proposal for 468-476 James North is both flexible and tremendously innovative: flexible sized units, flexible construction including sweat equity, flexible tenure (own and rent) and flexible and innovative financing. And if NvN/d can actually deliver condo ownership to people earning as little as \$25,000 a year, that is startling. Households with that income are not be able to afford the average *rent* in the city, let alone buy even the cheapest house.

Yet I share neighbours’ concerns that an eight-storey building exceeds the standard set by the secondary plan for the neighbourhood and that the planning department’s justification for exceeding the standard may set a precedent for other developments, most of which will not bring the benefits of affordable housing that the JvN/d plan does.

If eight storeys is needed to make this project viable, and to make it possible to provide housing that is affordable, let me suggest a possibility that would appear not to set such a negative precedent.

It would be preferable to permit the extra storeys for 468-476 James North as a trade-off for the community benefit of affordable housing units. Such trade-offs are allowed under Section 37 of the Planning Act and in Chapter F, Section 1.9, of the city’s Urban Official Plan. That section allows the city to permit greater height or density than allowed in the zoning bylaw in return for securing community benefits that include affordable housing. Proceeding that way, there would be only a limited precedent for future taller buildings, justifiable only if they too provide the community benefit of affordable units.

Respectfully submitted,

Bill Johnston