

CORRESPONDENCE

TO: The Council of the City of Hamilton

RE: Development Proposal at 225 John Street South (Corktown Plaza)

Councillors,

It was our hope to delegate at last Tuesday's Planning Committee meeting on the redevelopment proposal at 225 John Street South. Unfortunately, due to a hydro outage, we were unable to do so. Therefore, we would like to share our thoughts on this project with you below.

We support the redevelopment proposal, without reservation. It's a good use of land, in a phenomenal location, with all the necessary parameters that allow for successful high density development. We are happy to see that the Committee approved the project, and look forward to it getting underway as soon as possible.

Our concern, however, is that the current iteration of the proposal represents a downgrade when compared to the original concept. Our concern is amplified by the strong and clear indicators that suggest the negative changes made to this project have occurred due to City policies and attitudes.

Height and Massing

The most obvious change between the two iterations of the proposal is the height and massing of the project. The original scheme proposed developing two point towers upon a podium, and the updated plan proposes a single tower, with a 14 storey slab building on a podium.

There is a simple principle that must be understood - *when modifying any single aspect of a building, you CANNOT expect that aspect to be modified in isolation.*

In the case of this project, that modification was the height and massing.

The aesthetic impacts of these changes are severe.

The point tower located in the southeast corner of the site, which fell from 31 storeys to 27 storeys, grew much thicker in the process. The original 31 storey tower has a floor plate size of 808 square meters, which is nearly in line with the 750 square meter recommendation included in the City's Tall Building Guidelines, but the new 27 storey tower has a floor plate of 1081 square meters, far above the number in the Tall Building Guidelines.

The aesthetic result is a tower which is heftier, more imposing, with less elegant proportions, and the height reduction of four storeys will not prove perceptible to

those who look at the tower. This means that the change that resulted in a worse tower design will have been for nothing. ***Is this an improvement over the original plan?***

The massing and height changes will not solely impact those who look at the project, either. The future residents of this complex will be negatively impacted as well.

Individuals who live in the south end of the slab building which face eastward, will look directly towards the southwest tower. Conversely, residents of the southwest tower which face westward, will look directly towards the slab building. This is a very inwardly focused massing.

The room between these two masses is limited. For the first ten storeys of the proposal, the separation distance between the two masses is just 12 metres. It is also important to note that this 12 meter figure is further reduced by the extruding balconies on both the tower and the slab building, making the actual separation distance closer to 8.5 metres.

The previous proposal did not do this. Building two towers on site meant they didn't have to do this. Neither tower faced into the other, and the separation distance was much greater. ***Can you really consider this an improvement over the previous plan?***

Further, the massing changes have considerably worsened the John Street elevation, and most importantly, the street level design.

The original proposal (pictured below) included a high quality streetscape, paired with an east-to-west mid block connection as well as thoughtful podiums with sensible step backs and changes in materiality.



This has now been replaced by an elevation that is much less cohesive, much more sterile and plain, and much more overbearing. (pictured below) The 34 storey point tower proposed at the northwest corner of the site, which was sensitive and complimentary to the ground floor and podium massing, and which fit well into the context, has been replaced by a 14 storey slab building with strange stepbacks, and a design that appears to employ several different conflicting architectural styles, and which also imposes much more on the urban environment. ***Can you really call this an improvement?***



Unit count & unit size

We can see further negative impacts to the project when we look at unit count and unit size. Because of the change in height and massing, and the resulting decrease in buildable area, the number of units has dropped and the average size of units has dropped.

The total unit count falls slightly between the two proposals, going from 792 units to 769 units. This is not a huge decrease for a project of this size, but it is a decrease nonetheless when Hamilton needs as much new housing supply in the downtown as it can get.

The number of units below 50 square metres in size has ballooned 1500%, going from 22 in the original to 328 in the updated proposal. Similarly, the units above 50 square metres in size has fallen by over 40%, going from 770 in the previous proposal, to 441 in the current proposal. Ultimately, the knock-on effects from the height and massing changes have resulted in fewer units and smaller units. ***Does this actually represent an improvement over the previous plan?***

Parking

When we look at the parking, we see a head-scratcher. The amount of units has gone down, and the units have gone down in size, but the number of residential parking spaces has increased significantly, from 355 residential spaces to 462 residential spaces. An increase of 107 spaces is sizable.

This is in opposition to Hamilton's downtown reaching its fullest potential. We know that it is key that our downtown be friendly to pedestrians, transit users, and cyclists for it to become as vibrant and successful as possible. We also know that the last thing our downtown needs is to be further customized to fit the needs of the personal automobile.

It also represents what we should not be doing to developments that are proposed in areas with good transit. It is undeniable that this site is one of the best in terms of transit options, and rather than encourage further car usage, this development should be encouraging further transit usage. This is imperative considering the state of climate change, and to encourage further automobile usage considering this, is frankly irresponsible.

Further, the cost of parking is important to note as well. It is not insignificant. It falls in the tens of thousands per space range, and underground spaces, like proposed here, are the most expensive type to construct. At the end of the day, someone has to pay for these parking spots. That falls to the end users, in this case, the future residents of this development.

They will also end up paying for this parking whether they want it or not, or if they use it or not. Multiple studies have found that parking adds hundreds of dollars to monthly rents, whether or not you use it, and whether or not you specifically pay for the privilege of one of those spots through an additional monthly fee. It is simply that expensive.

Given the ever rising rents in Hamilton, we should be doing all we can to lower that cost, not increase it. ***Can the increase in parking spaces, thus, be considered an improvement?***

John Street Widening

The three metre road widening along John Street does not serve a purpose. The street is plenty wide, with no gridlock, and with wide sidewalks on both sides. A road widening would make the street less hospitable to pedestrians, and further reinforce the downtown's reputation as a place to drive through, rather than live in.

Further, it is unlikely that the City would ever be able to execute a road widening. On the immediate west side of John Street, the enclosed parking lot of the 57 Forest apartment building prevents the widening of the street. Further south and further north down John Street, there are numerous buildings that are either not conducive to widening or not desirable to demolish in order to widen the street.

If widening were somehow possible, though, it would still be undesirable. It would run counter to realizing the potential of the downtown, would be in opposition to the climate necessities, and would further entrench the downtown as a place of the automobile. The original proposal realized these facts, and thus did not include a road widening. ***So, is the addition of the road widening really an improvement to this proposal?***

Retail Space

The final point we'd like to raise is the decrease in retail space. The original proposal contained 2,100 square metres of retail space, and the current proposal contains only 930 square metres. This is a major disappointment, as the neighbourhood has been clear about its desire for a local grocery store.

The retail space in the original proposal was also set up suitably for a grocery store. It included a large, nearly 1,500 square metre space that was perfect in size and shape for a grocery store use. The largest retail space is only 510 square metres, which is roughly equivalent to the Hasty Market convenience store on site today.

In the previous proposal, this grocery store sized space was made possible by the well thought out massing, specifically, the podiums being oriented east-to-west

rather than north-to-south. The massing of the new proposal precludes such a space. ***Can this be called an improvement to the plan?***

In sum, we believe that the changes made to this proposal have been for the worse, and have been caused by the change in height and massing (most) or because of the City's attitude and policies (parking and road widening).

We continue to support the current proposal, and believe it represents an above-average development in the context of Hamilton proposals. We do, however, feel it could have been better, and indeed would have been better, if the above changes were not made, and not pushed for by the City.

Our hope is that you, as a City, look at this development, and ask yourself whether the changes you've pushed for or caused, have made this proposal better or worse.

It is clear to us that it has been for the worse. We would further encourage you, as the City, to think about this question not just in the context of this application, but on future applications, and development in the city as a whole.

Respectfully,

Lachlan Holmes, on behalf of HamiltonForward