

2022
Patrick Bermingham

Dear Mme Clerk:

Please forward this letter to the Planning Committee for their meeting of April 5th, 2022 regarding the Application for Proposed Development at Academy and Wilson Streets in Ancaster, Official Plan Amendment UHOPA -22-004 and Zoning Bylaw Amendment ZAC-22-011. Thank you.

Dear Planning Committee members:

As a native of Ancaster, I am deeply troubled by the current **eight-storey** development proposed at the intersection of Academy and Wilson streets by Messrs. Spallaci/Manchia which goes far beyond the historical limit of 2.5 stories in Ancaster.

With partners, I am actively involved in the careful preservation and restoration of three buildings in Hamilton 's Gore Park, which we are restoring to life:

1. We have completed a successful conversion of 103 King St East, the previous Capitol Theatre, preserving its entrance and imposing grandeur with an expansive glass facade.
2. We are also beathing new life into two buildings, (62 and 64 King St. East) which were empty for years prior to their purchase in 2017. Our plan to add two storeys to the existing four storeys was met with strong resistance and pushback—even five were discouraged although there is no historical designation on either building and the current regulations allow for six storeys. We are accommodating to these limits.

Of course, there are clear economic advantages to more square footage to rent. However, we accept that these buildings form a part of the city's historic fabric and that their proximity to the Cenotaph requires sensitivity. We do not own the streetscape; we try to fit in to it. We have been careful not to cast a shadow on the cenotaph - not because we absolutely must but because it is the right thing to do.

Taking into account our own efforts to be sensitive to historical context, why would eight storey buildings be permitted in an 18th century village streetscape, if just six storeys do not fit downtown?

This application suggests two of the most defining aspects of the Village of Ancaster are now to be discarded: HEIGHT and SETBACK.

Ancaster has always had a height limit of 2.5 stories or 9 meters. Height is both one of the most defining characteristics and one of the easiest to regulate. It does not fall prey to the opinions of style, and a height limit defines cities and villages alike. Ancaster has maintained its village character for the past 230 years in large part because of this height limit.

The second feature of the village is the setback of its buildings, which is interwoven with its ancient past. The village was sited at the intersection of three significant first nations pathways. For thousands of years, Wilson Street was a footpath leading to the Mohawk village and Detroit. The houses and buildings that line this ancient pathway are for the most part set back 40 paces from the original path. They define the route and the alignment of thousands of years of history.

In 1793 Ancaster was one of a handful of settlements being considered for the new capital of Upper Canada, By 1800 there was regular mail service between Montreal and Detroit, passing through Ancaster, with a spur line going to Niagara. Hamilton was not in the picture then. The pathway was enlarged to a road, then a wider road, and recently a center lane was added, but the buildings lining the street still define the path to the Mohawk Village. Removing or relocating the Marr-Phillipo house is tantamount to saying that there was never a road here. No one ever passed by this way on their way to Detroit or Montreal. It erases history.

Neighbouring Dundas became a town having three story buildings, but still has managed to maintain the character and fabric of its mercantile past with a largely intact main street, and scrupulously restored (and valuable) heritage housing stock. Hamilton followed suit and became a city with buildings that doubled the height of Dundas.

Ancaster maintained its character not because developers in the past lacked the imagination or finances to exceed the height limits; rather, they respected the streetscape and heritage of one of the first villages in Upper Canada. It's hard to understand why Ancaster does not have a [historic designation district](#) (unlike Waterdown, Dundas, etc.) Of course, cataloging requires resources; responsible planning and prohibiting demolition does not. For the 150th anniversary of Canada, there was a laudable effort to [identify buildings standing](#) at confederation. Nearly 200 in Ancaster claim this history: yet two of them were demolished by the developers who then called the empty lots "neglected brownfields".

Who really cares??? Who is harmed by unconstrained development? Every single homeowner and developer who has invested in property in Ancaster Village, built a home or addition and managed to stay within the limits of the bylaws. Every single resident who has chosen to live in a sleepy village and made a long-term investment in the place where they live and send their children to school. Even the auto garage (!) across the street that preserved and repurposed its early 19th century building.

A cynic might say, let's erase the historical character of Ancaster and let it be absorbed into the city of Hamilton . Ancaster will not be allowed to maintain the character of its origin. It will no longer be a village or a town, it will simply be an abused back yard of the city of Hamilton.

No, rather I would suggest that true resolution before city council should be the following:

I hope that City council will reconsider the long term impact of destroying the character of Ancaster and recognize both its history and value as a complementary and contrasting streetscape to the core of Hamilton. The proposed Development will not benefit or enhance the Town of Ancaster. It will simply destroy the character and value of the existing homes and buisnesses.

Sent to you with greatest concern,

Patrick Bermingham