

PROJECT BRIEF



AGRICOLA | MIXED-USE DEVELOPMENT

Peninsula North, Halifax | Nova Scotia

Purpose of submission

WMFares Architects is pleased to make an application for a Site Specific Plan Amendment to the Halifax Municipal Planning Strategy and the Halifax Peninsula Land Use By-law to enable a development agreement 4 to 5 storey mixed-use building at 2440 Agricola Street. We are seeking to undertake the required amendments and development agreement processes concurrently and have enclosed the following information for review as part of the application process:

1. A full set of building drawings including site plan, floor plans, elevations
2. Location Certificate
3. 3D views / Renderings
4. Development Data
5. Traffic Impact Statement
6. Site Servicing Schematic

Context, Zoning & Existing Planning Designations

The subject property is comprised of 3 lots zoned R2 under the current Land Use By-law and MDR under the Peninsula North Planning Area 6 of the Municipal Planning Strategy. There are 10 existing apartment units and a total of 1000 square feet of existing ground floor commercial retail. Neighbouring lots along the East-side of Agricola street are predominately zoned C-2. Adjacent lots on the West-side of Agricola Street are mixed C2 and R2 zones which can be considered inconsistent with the major commercial use and growing commercial fabric along Agricola Street.

The site is located in one of Halifax's most up and coming neighborhoods with evidence of a mixed demographic of professionals, young families, and empty nesters taking up residence in both character defined Victorian Homes and recent multiunit developments such as Harris East and Q-Lofts. Agricola Street serves at one of the neighbourhoods' primary amenity corridor which has also been subject to recent commercial revitalization by means of new mixed-use developments and building fit-ups housing new independent restaurants, artist studios, coffee shops, bakeries, breweries, bike shops and various retail boutiques.

Project Description + Design Strategies

The proposed four to five storey development responds to recent neighbourhood trends and existing neighbouring land-use through a mixed-use design that houses approximately 3,200 square feet of ground floor commercial space a total of 30 modestly sized apartments. Due to the nature of a shallow lot and direct frontage on a major street, the site is not conducive for large family-type units. As such, the proposal reflects a predominate mix of studios and one-bedroom type units (70%). The remaining 30% are allocated for larger 2-bedroom type units.

The built environment along Agricola Street can be observed as a tightly-knit urban fabric with narrow volumetric proportions that meet and animate the street edge. It is this characteristic that contributes to proper urban design, street form, and street walkability. We would argue that the urban form and distinct commercial character functions as *the* catalyst for the current growth and revitalization of the North End.

Having identified this key urban characteristic, the design of the proposed building adopts a street language of rhythmic proportions through five clearly defined vertical volumes that form a 4-storey streetwall. Each volume is materially characterized by two types of smooth-faced brick and inset balconies that further enhance and animate the street edge.

At grade, the building is slightly setback from the property line. This creates a wider sidewalk and provides a clear distinction between the at grade commercial use and the five residential brick volumes above. The ground floor is also distinctly clad in vertical wood siding that is in-keeping with existing neighbourhood character, and provides a haptic pedestrian-scale experience. The wood cladding wraps over both the pedestrian entrance and vehicular garage door as strategy to disguise private entries from public sight and seamlessly integrate with the remaining ground floor language. In addition, ground floor retail shops include large transparent storefront windows as well as integrated exterior benches for both customers and the passerby.

The building mass above the streetwall steps back 8 feet, and serves as private terraces for larger type units on the 5th level. The rear of the building mimics the architectural language of the streetwall, and is setback approximately 15 feet from the interior property line. At grade, this 15-foot setback serves as outdoor patio space for commercial/retail tenants.

Change of Circumstance and Neighbourhood Compatibility

Amendments to the MPS are not considered unless a change of circumstance is evident, and the existing land-use is no longer appropriate. We offer the following rationale for why new development would be appropriate for this specific site in conjunction with how existing policies no longer apply under current economic, social and cultural climates:

- A primary goal of the Regional Plan is to densify the peninsula and encourage active, walkable streetscapes. The current by-laws, angle controls and height limits restrict feasible high-quality architectural designs that would enrich and enhance neighbourhoods.
- The central location of the site is in walking proximity to civic amenities including parks (Halifax Commons) and community centres (Olympic Centre, Halifax North Memorial Library, Emera Oval).
- The location of the site is within walking distance to Quinpool Road and Gottingen Street corridors with growing service and commercial amenities.
- Existing properties no longer serve their original single family-use, and have been subdivided into apartment units largely due to the R2 zone and primarily due to the site's centralized location with accessibility to a wide range of civic and commercial amenities. In addition, there is one existing non-conforming commercial use at grade.
- Medium-scale developments can be identified within the immediate surroundings including 2 multi-unit buildings on Maynard Street between Harris and Roberts Street, as well as one new mixed-use building within the same civic block at the corner of Agricola and West Street. The increased density within the neighbourhood in conjunction with occurring commercial revitalization indicates a significant change in the economic and cultural climate within the North End.
- The subject site falls within an R2 block sandwiched between predominant C2 zones along a commercial neighbourhood corridor. This can be easily interpreted as 'holes' within the street (and commercial) fabric which contradict good urban design principles of continuity within the public street realm. Our proposal seeks to re-establish this continuity by allowing commercial retail use at grade.
- Policies that allow for development agreements can regulate and promote proper urban and architectural design principles to ensure that new developments are built to the highest quality; which in turn promotes civic walkability and livability. This approach secures *design* as tool for better living, as opposed to an as-of-right process limited by height with no specific controls for good design.

Conclusion:

Thank you for considering our application. We are strong believers that design excellence as a problem solving tool in both the public and private realms can serve as a catalyst for urban revitalization, walkability, and livability on the Halifax Peninsula. We look forward to working together with staff in pursuing these unique opportunities.

Sincerely,

Original Signed

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