

Case 20871 Midtown North 6070 Almon Street, Halifax Community Engagement Report



PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT JANUARY 22, 2019

On January 22, 2019 HRM Staff hosted a public engagement workshop at the Halifax Forum in the Maritime Hall. Along with HRM Staff, representatives from Westwood Group, WSP, and FBM Architecture were present. The purpose of the engagement session was to provide information to the public on the proposed development, explain the process involved for an application of this type, and receive feedback, hear concerns, and answer questions regarding the proposed development. Approximately 91 members of the neighbourhood attended the event at the Halifax Forum to provide feedback on the proposed development. The comments received during the engagement session will inform the process and form part of the public record.

The engagement session was broken into four parts: open house; presentation by Staff; presentation by applicant; and a workshop. At the open house, community members could see boards of the proposed development showing site plans, building orientation, elevations, renderings, and a 3D physical model of the site and surrounding neighbourhood provided by the applicant. The staff presentation was done by Jennifer Chapman, Planner III with HRM, and provided an overview of the process, role of staff, relevant policy, and high-level review of the proposed development. The applicants then gave a presentation highlighting the key points of the development, considerations for the neighbourhood, and explained the rationale behind the design. The final stage of the engagement session, participants were asked to break into smaller groups and join a table. At the tables the participants had the opportunity to discuss what aspects of the proposed development that they found appealing and what aspects gave them concern and to suggest possible solutions to their concerns.

REVIEW OF PROPOSAL

WSP, on behalf of Westwood Construction, requested to enter into a development agreement which would enable a mixed-use development consisting of five buildings on a shared private driveway between Almon Street and St. Albans Street. The five buildings will be situated on three shared podiums with a total of 710,353 sqft (65,993.40 m²) gross floor area and 325 residential units. Below ground level under the site is a proposed two-level parking structure totalling 368,264 sqft (34,212.56 m²). The proposal has a shared street concept, extending King Street and Clifton Street through the site as private roads. Between Almon and St. Albans streets the private King Street extension allows access to the centre of the site where a small surface parking lot and event space, identified as King Square, is located. The private extension to Clifton Street runs parallel to the King Street extension and provides access to Clifton Green, a park space between residential uses and live/work studios.

Building A: Located in the centre of the site on Almon Street, Building A is a 25-storey residential tower situated on a two-storey commercial podium (total height: 27-stories at 287 ft./ 87.4 m).

Building B: Located in the centre of the site on St. Albans Street, Building B is a five-storey



Figure 1: Concept Site Plan (Source: WSP/FBM Architecture)

residential tower situated on a two-storey commercial podium (total height: 7-storeys at 91 ft./ 27.7m).

Building C: Located along the North-East boundary of the site, Building C is an eight-storey residential or commercial tower situated on a two-storey commercial podium (total height: 10-storey at 121 ft./ 36.8m).

Building D: Located along the South-West boundary of the site, Building D is a 10-storey residential building with one-storey of commercial on the ground floor (total height: 10-storey at 116 ft./35.3m.).

Building E: Located at the North-East boundary of the site, Building E is a two-storey cultural building with commercial uses located along the ground level (total height: two-storeys at 57 ft. 6 in./ 17.5m).

WHAT WE HEARD

During the workshop session, participants were asked to list their likes and concerns regarding the proposed development. In total we received approximately 200 comments regarding a variety of topics for both categories. The comments were then sorted and a copy of the raw data can be found in Appendix A of this document.

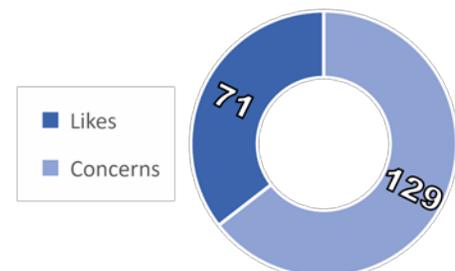


Figure 2: Type of comments

WHAT WAS LIKED?

In total we received 71 comments relating to what was liked about the proposal, the breakdown can be seen in Figure 3. The comments were sorted into six (6) categories as they were generally consistent, the comments have been summarized below. The full comments can be found in Appendix A of this report.

- 1 - Neighbourhood Concept
- 2 - Connections
- 3 - Design
- 4 - Open Space
- 5 - Mixed Use
- 6 - Housing Options

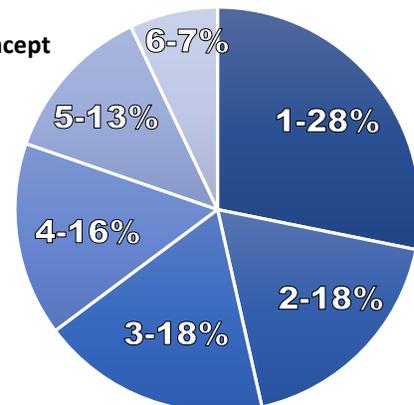


Figure 3: What was liked?

Neighbourhood and Mixed Use

Broadly, the most liked aspect of the proposal is the neighbourhood concept and proposed vision for the area. Participants commented it will be an improvement to the area and that the development of a new neighbourhood will be a great conversion of a former industrial site. It was cited multiple times the proposed residential uses and the way they relate to the public space is appreciated, such as the live/work studios fronting onto Clifton Green, and how this will increase the interaction between public and private realms within the neighbourhood. One of the consistent comments that we heard was how the proposed cultural space will provide interest in the neighbourhood and will help replace some community spaces that have been lost. The idea of mixed use was supported by the comments and it was suggested that it would encourage great active uses at grade through the proposed development. There were several comments in favour of the proposed mixed uses and the benefits that the kind of development brings to an area. Some of the desired uses for the area included grocery, cafes, studio spaces, and co-op/start-up space.

Design and Connections

Staff received many positive comments related to the design and improved connections to the existing neighbourhood. Re-integrating the grid network for public use by connecting Almon Street to St. Albans Street through the proposed King and Clifton private road extensions was a well received aspect of the design. The idea of extra wide sidewalks along Almon street were also commented on multiple times and was something that the public would like to see implemented on the site.

Several comments reflected that the design of the buildings is modern and that people felt positively about the layout of the site. Staff also heard that the public felt that there has been consideration for wind and shadow impacts for the area. Several of the comments believe that the height of the buildings is acceptable for the area, the density is appropriate, and the height is offset by the amount of open space in the surrounding area. One comment in favour of the height and density states that the proposed development intends to increase density in an area which is near the downtown core and does so by redeveloping an area which has been underutilized from a residential standpoint.

Open Space and Housing Options

The open space considerations of the proposed development were well received by the public who were in attendance. Specifically, comments indicated that the parks, green roofs, trees, and the relationship between townhouse, live/work studios, and green space were considered to be positive features of the proposal.

Additionally, the comments indicated that the public supported the intention of providing affordable housing and varied housing options on the site.

WHAT ARE THE CONCERNS?

Through the public meeting we received 129 comments regarding concerns members of the public had regarding the proposed development, the breakdown of the comments can be found in Figure 4. The concerns with the proposed development were less homogenous than what was liked about the development. This resulted in eleven (11) categories ranging from traffic, with the most comments, to impacts on the pedestrian and transit network, with the least comments. The comments have been summarized below. The full comments can be found in Appendix A of this report.

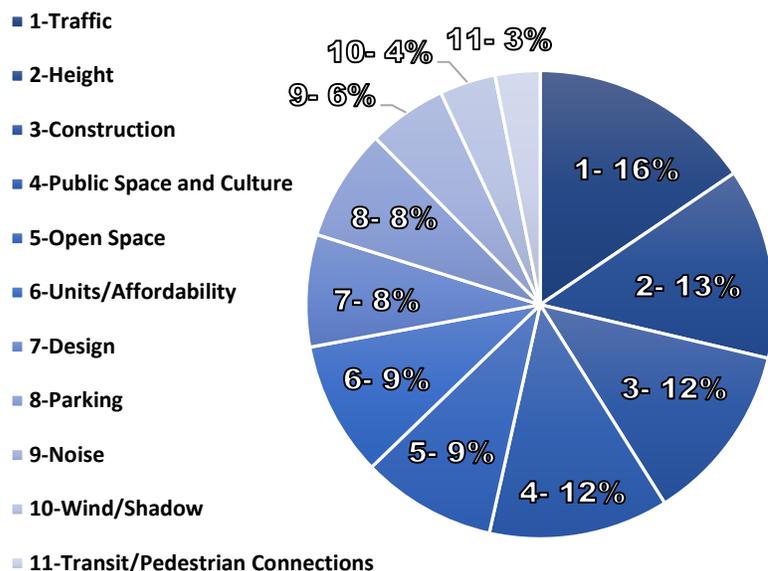


Figure 4: What are the concerns?

Traffic, Parking, and Transit/Pedestrian

Traffic, Parking, and Transit/Pedestrian were concerns which were raised at the open house, with 34 comments relating to these categories. Some participants would like to see the potential to one day incorporate Bloomfield Street into the new grid on the site. Generally, the comments around traffic related to the increase that would occur with the scale of this development in an area which is already perceived to be congested. As one participant stated, the increases in vehicle traffic will impact the adjacent and feeder streets and the amount of parking proposed will invite more cars. Also discussed, was how the shared street concept would function and where the priority sits between pedestrian and vehicle traffic, as well as slowing traffic and preventing shortcutting through the community. Comments were received regarding the impact parking will have on the area. These comments ranged from losing existing free street parking to the high ratio of parking needed on the site to accommodate the number of units that have been proposed. The public also raised concern about the amount and location of visitor, customer, and overflow parking.

Concerns were also raised regarding the placement of bus stops and how the bus routes will be affected in the area. The public questioned if Halifax Transit has been consulted through the process and if there will be a need for a pedestrian crosswalk across Almon Street, between Gladstone Street and Robie Street.

Height, Design, and Wind/Shadow

Height, design, and wind/shadow were brought up a number of times and accounted for a total of 32 of the concerns relating to the proposed development. Height is a major concern among the participants at the open house. Many of the comments relating to height stated that 27 stories for this area is out of context with the surrounding neighbourhood. Some participants would accept the height if the profile were slimmer or the density was distributed across the development, other participants would like to see the building be 17 stories maximum or no taller than the neighbouring Gladstone or Point North developments.

Some comments reflected the desire to see buildings which are slimmer and less boxy in appearance with more articulation at the top. Other comments indicated an interest in seeing historic elements incorporated into the design of the site and buildings. The public also expressed concern about potential wind impacts of the proposal. Shadow was less of a concern as it was stated that much of the shadow impact would be across the street on the Rona and Shoppers Drug Mart properties.

Public and Open Space

Public and open space issues were brought up as concerns a total of 28 times. Participants were concerned with the lack of definition regarding the cultural space which has been proposed within the development. Many comments were concerned with the dual use aspect of the King Square space and worry that it will always be the overflow parking area for the site rather than a multi-use square supporting the neighbourhood. Several comments noted that King Square would be a great opportunity for a green space within the site and could provide opportunity for the restaurants and patios that may front onto the Square. It was noted through the open house that more green space is need in this area as there are no parks of any substance within a short walk of the area and that park space needs to be of quality, not just treed parking areas. There were questions around what type of open space would be available, if the green roofs will be publicly accessible, and that there may not be sufficient green space for the residents.

Construction and Noise

Construction and noise account for 23 of the comments received from the public. There were many questions regarding the duration, phasing, and how the neighbouring communities are going to be impacted during the construction. The impacts from blasting came up several times and questions around potential mitigation of this activity. Construction noise was a primary concern for many people as well as noise concerns related to residential units, balconies, onsite trucks, and the proposed pubs and squares.

Units and Affordability

There was a total of 12 comments relating to the types and affordability of units within the proposed development. Many of the comments are regarding the pricing and what will be considered affordable within the context of this development. Several concerns were raised regarding fixed income support and providing housing for those on fixed incomes. Some participants were concerned that the units may be unable to accommodate families and that there could be high turn over within the neighbourhood.

IDEAS

As part of the meeting, if time permitted at the table, participants were asked to provide ideas or solutions to help provide direction to their likes and concerns with the development. It was thought that having an anchor tenant as one of the commercial spaces would help provide a base level of customer traffic and that a business like a late-night coffee shop would be a good option for the area. Other participants suggested that public art, unique architecture for the cultural space, and larger spaces for trees to grow would be good additions to the development. Also proposed was the possibility of having direct access to medical services from the street and that having a diverse group of retailers and services would be beneficial to the neighbourhood. As mentioned under the Neighbourhood and Mixed-Use section, some of the desired uses for the area included grocery, cafes, studio spaces, and co-op/start-up space. It was also suggested that the live-work studios need to be affordable and that the office spaces should be oriented towards small office uses.

SUMMARY

There were broad themes that were discussed at all of the tables in some form. The most common of these were around height, neighbourhood concept, connections, traffic, construction, and public space.

Height was brought up as both a liked part of the design and concern in the context of the compatibility with the surrounding neighbourhood. Height and density were viewed as good components of the design and some participants felt as though a former industrial site close to downtown was a good location. However, it was felt by other participants that within the context of this neighbourhood and the surrounding developments, 27 stories would be out of character with the area. The Gladstone and Point North buildings were used to illustrate what participants considered to be appropriate heights for this area.

The neighbourhood concept was well received by participants and there was consensus around the concept that the live-work studios, and the creation of a cultural hub would benefit the neighbourhood and be a good use of a former industrial site. The establishment of new connections for both pedestrian and vehicle traffic was liked by the participants at the meeting, with several people commenting they liked the re-establishment of the grid in the area, the proposed wide sidewalks along Almon Street, and the contained on-site parking.

There were concerns raised around the amount of traffic the proposed development may bring to an area which is already perceived to be congested. A number of participants raised general concern around traffic in the area with several curious how the shared street concept will work and how short cutting through the development will be handled. Construction was another concern brought up with blasting and the length of time or phasing of the construction being the primary concerns. Public space and cultural uses were a concern for some of the participants. There were several questions around the proposed use of King Square as a parking lot and open space and how often the space would be used for activities other than surface parking. There were many concerns raised regarding the amount and quality of the open and green space, as it is felt by some participants there is a lack of quality spaces in the neighbourhood.

This feedback and engagement helped to illustrate what the public and residents value most in their neighbourhood. The topics which are recurring will help prioritize the needs for the neighbourhood and changes which may be made to the development during the process. The comments received during the engagement session will inform the process and form part of the public record. Feedback on the development is encouraged throughout this process and will help guide decision-making for this and future developments. Thank you to all who attended the open house and participated in the table discussions, your feedback is valued and appreciated.

APPENDIX A – COMMENTS

The Likes (71 Comments)

Neighbourhood Concept (20 Comments)

- Residential that relates to the street
- Studio live/ work uses
- Improvement to the neighbourhood
- Cultural space adds interest
- Cultural space
- Mixed income housing
- Making a neighbourhood
- Continuation of the street
- Community aspect (The vision)
- A new neighbourhood
- Cultural Hub (Could create spaces that were lost)
- Live work studios
- Increasing public/private interactions of people in neighbourhood
- Will be an addition for the whole neighbourhood
- Looks like it will be an addition to a grungy area
- Designated cultural space a positive X3
- Better than existing
- Clifton not a great street as is, like that Clifton will be improved through the concept
- Building a community
- New development for redevelopment of industrial site

Connections/Parking/Traffic (13 Comments)

- Contained underground parking
- Parking – Like that there will be reserved parking for commercial
- Re-integration of the Grid
- Connection of King and Clifton
- Design Kings Square like Argyle where it is for pedestrians first
- Pedestrian connection to Gladstone, but how will the connection be dealt with?
- Wide sidewalks on Almon
- Idea of permanent throughway publicly 100% open from Gladstone through to Bloomfield for bike and pedestrians, strollers and wheelchairs
- Very wide sidewalks on Almon street are important, regulate in DA to 20+ feet
- Liked to hear about so much parking on the site
- Like the wide sidewalks, put that in the DA
- It provides access to two side streets that are currently off the road grid, and it does so with seemingly inclusive design features.
- 2 street through Clifton

Design (13 Comments)

- Modern look/design
- Generally nice design and layout
- Locations of towers
- Design of the building (as seen in renderings)
- Attractive
- Height
- Density is good
- Consideration for wind and shadow
- Height is offset by surrounding open space
- Like overall layout, with shadows falling on Rona and Shoppers and little in the common green space
- Overall design ok
- Height ok, I was in favour of developments on Young St and the Monahan Towers. This former industrial area is where height can go.
- Intends to increase density in an area that is very close to downtown core. It does so by redeveloping lots that were underutilized from a residential standpoint.

Open Space/Green Space (11 Comments)

- Green space
- Green space
- Green space
- Parks
- Relationship between townhouse and green space
- Green roof
- The tree plantings
- Trees/Street Trees
- Pedestrian availability – Add more!
- Parks and roads through
- Affordable housing park

Mixed Use (9 Comments)

- Mixed use/room concept
- Office and residential
- Employment and residential together
- Mixed development
- Commercial space
- Mixed use
- Benefits to mix of uses
- Great active uses at grade along Clifton

- Allow grocery, cafes, roastery and coffee shop, flower shop, hardware, movie, wo-working, start up zone, artist studio space

Housing Options (5 Comments)

- Affordable housing
- Affordable housing
- Different types of housing and affordability
- More affordable units are good
- Family housing is great with doors on the street “townhome style”

The Concerns (129 Comments)

Traffic (20 Comments)

- Increased traffic
- Transportation impacts
- Transportation issues
- Traffic from site
- Traffic increase
- Traffic (was concerned thinking all on St. Albans, better that there is a split from Almon to get to underground parking)
- Traffic
- Traffic at King and Almon giving number of parking stalls
- Increased traffic
- How to slow traffic
- Increase the vehicle traffic on the adjacent and feeder streets, and the underground parking will invite more cars. This will have ramifications for air quality in the area, and again pedestrians and cyclists. This will also have negative ramifications for street noise all the way down to the west end side of Almon Str. These costs are not explicitly recognized and factored into the costs/benefits of the proposal. Yet, they are perfectly anticipated consequences of this development, and can be remedied by scaling down the towers and the underground parking.
- Where will Gladstone vehicles go. Almon
- Stopping commuters from driving through
- Congestion on Clifton conflict with pedestrian oriented streets
- Additional stop lights on Robie and Almon
- How will the shared street concept function?
- How to prevent shortcutting through community
- Obstruction of right of way during construction behind building C
- Hopefully the laneway between Robie and King will be used for delivery/trash to keep that out of the King/Clifton area
- 3 Driveways at Building D

Height (17 Comments)

- Height is out of proportion with the neighbourhood
- Why 27 storeys? Does it need to be so tall
- Height
- Tall building (would prefer 17 storey, Gladstone height, spread-out around the site)
- Height (Make the 27 smaller and the 10 larger)
- Tower too tall and wide
- 27 storey building seems out of context
- Concerned about the precedent setting more than the height itself
- Taller tower would be more acceptable if it were slenderer with huge setback after first and second story, think how the Alexander appears on Lower Water
- Height of building A (for perspective, 27 stories vs 18 for Point North which already stands out for its height)
- Height of the buildings is not in keeping with residential neighbourhood to the south west (suggest keeping similar with Gladstone building)
- No taller than Gladstone Ridge ideally, way too tall!
- No taller than Point North
- I am against "vertical sprawl"
- A 25 storey tower will take away from the intended plaza feeling. Drawing at the street level look great, but once pedestrians and cyclists are below a building this high, they will NOT instinctively find it attractive or inclusive, feeling dwarfed by the towers surrounding them.
- Adjacent scale matters. I do not know what the council can do to prevent the height exceeding 15 stories max. But if not done, much of the design features will likely remain wishful thinking.
- 27 storeys is too high

Construction (16 Comments)

- What's the construction duration
- Water pressure
- Water Pressure (I live on Almon, there are issues now)
- How will the neighbourhood be impact during construction?
- Blasting is a concern
- What is the phasing
- Construction
- Impact of construction on surrounding buildings
- How to get rid of the oil in the old Acadian Lines Station
- Construction process
- Damage from blasting
- Add colour no gray buildings
- Design needs improvement

- Tearing down buildings which could otherwise be cultural space
- Impact to client experience in my spa business tranquil setting
- Blasting and potential damage to residential foundation nearby, will assessment be done prior to blasting?

King Square/Cultural Uses (16 Comments)

- What is the cultural space
- Consultation with Kazan Theatre Owner
- Tax break for cultural hub
- Turn King Square into green space, King Square need work, minimal green space in area
- Opportunity to green space. Could be beneficial to restaurants-patios
- Number of days in the year to designate Kings for patios
- Orient the entry to the cultural space with Kings Square
- Electric vehicle charging stations in Kings Square
- Include social enterprises the likes of which were previously on the site
- Acknowledge complexity of building, arts space so it can serve diversity of artists
- Dual use sounds good, but Kings Square will likely just be parking
- More public open space that is green and not used as parking
- Kings Square is meaningless as a public space if there are no stipulation in the DA about it being closed to cars at certain times reliably every week
- Would be nice to see affordable community space to welcome organizations like “Good things in Store” and “Bike again back again”
- Sign public MOUS with some of these organizations to give us assurance they will have access
- Cultural should be directed back to Bloomfield heritage school buildings and atrium link

Outdoor/Green Space (12 Comments)

- No playground space, Natural playground
- Add levels to open space
- Make friendly to kids
- “wave” art
- Use trees for passive shading
- Be specific about which building have green space, should be all, roof top gardens?
- More public open space that is green and not used as parking
- Amount of green space vs the amount of people crammed into this area
- Need more green space
- Ensure sufficient green space and or common space for residents

- More green space is need on this because there are no parks of any substance within a short walk of this area. The city needs to take leadership on this, not just a treed parking lot, but actual quality green space
- HRM: What is the green space sqft (especially natural open space) per person in these blocks (Windsor, Young, Argicola, North) compared to other parts of the peninsula and try to equalize it!!!

Units/Affordability (12 Comments)

- Affordability of units
- Quality of materials in accessible/affordable units
- Cost/affordability
- Accessibility
- Fixed income support
- Accounting for pensions
- Rental pricing for all units, not just affordable
- Enough tenants
- Subsidized rentals Could add to a lot of movement in the neighbourhood
- Unit size to accommodate families
- Affordable building looks depressing compared to others
- Building E institutional/cultural? I would prefer affordable housing geared towards individuals who live independently with disabilities such as vision, mobility, and who do not have large incomes to afford quality accessible units.

Design (10 Comments)

- Keep potential to incorporate Bloomfield Street into the grid
- Don't put podium where street could go one day
- Buildings are boxy, echo the heritage of the area more in articulation and colour (eg bishops landing)
- No elevations or vies from Robie, current buildings on Robie are only 2 stories so building "C" will loom overall those, want to know how that will look
- This is such a huge and complicated proposal and it is so hard to understand; would you consider doing a second consultation after the PAC and before the hearing to see if developer/partners want to incorporate more public feedback
- Concern about back of building C and E
- Online there was a design of old bus. Really liked that nod to heritage
- Mentioned to Danny C on Gladstone project there should be commemoration of the horses from military stables/field days
- More articulated attractive top (Like Alexander) as to not loom so boxy
- Monolithic facades. Not the Doyle. Should be broken up x3

Parking (10 Comments)

- Visitor parking
- Increased parking

- Overflow parking
- Not enough visitor parking
- Loss of free street parking
- Will there continue to be free street parking, this is important
- Lots of parking needed!
- Parking garage: where is the entry and exit, will right of way lane be access to the parking?
- High ratio parking to residential units needed to avoid excessive parking on residential streets nearby.
- Parking spots needed for residential plus lots of community parking

Noise (7 Comments)

- Balcony noise
- Unit noise
- Beepers on trucks
- Noise from squares
- Evening pub noise
- Noise (need notice for blasting)
- Concerned about noise throughout construction, during daytime and evening hours

Wind/Shadow (5 Comments)

- Consequences, implications, traffic, lots of people, seems brushed over, wind tunnel, shadows
- Wind
- Wind
- Wind turbines within the buildings
- Shadow

Transit/Pedestrian (4 Comments)

- Where will busses stop
- How will metro transit be consulted
- Will bus routes change
- Need pedestrian crosswalk on Almon Street