

March 16, 2018

Halifax Regional Municipality
1841 Argyle Street
P.O. Box 1749
Halifax, Nova Scotia
B3J 3A5

Attention: HRM Planning Staff

Re: Development Agreement Application – Proposed Apartment Building Development,
1034-1056 Wellington Street, Halifax, Nova Scotia

Design Rationale Addressing Halifax's Five Key Planning Principles

In the summer of 2017, Halifax Regional Council have directed planning staff to evaluate requests for site-specific secondary municipal planning strategy amendments utilizing the goals and objectives of the Centre Plan's five Key Planning Principles as the main criteria. These key planning principles are identified in Table 2 of the Halifax Regional Council Report dated August 1, 2017 as follows:

1. Transition
2. Pedestrian Oriented
3. Human-Scale
4. Building Design
5. Context-sensitive

To help aid in planning staff's appraisal of the proposed plan amendment for Wellington Street, we have provided the following design rationale as to how the overall building design directly responds to each of these five Key Planning Principles. This text is intended to be read in conjunction with the revised architectural plans and elevations and renderings separately submitted.

Site Context

The site for the proposed apartment building is at mid-block on Wellington Street which sits between various disparate building types and uses. To the west, the site is bordered by a 15 storey + penthouse white concrete apartment building set well back from the street (Civic #1094). To the north is a 3 storey, 8-unit apartment complex with an addition that was incorporated into the building via the R2A By Law for additions to existing buildings. It has exterior wood and vinyl siding built right to the sidewalk line (Civic #1136). Moving further south along the street towards Inglis and St Mary's University, there is Century Tower, a 12 storey plus 2 storey high penthouse (Civic #1074), the new 10 storey plus penthouse condo under construction (The Gorsebrook), and an existing 5 storey multi-unit apartment building across the street from The Gorsebrook.

Bordering the site to the West is a gravel Impark parking lot and the 6 storey Atlantic Provinces Special Education Authority building where Dalhousie and St. Mary's are pursuing collaboration on a new hockey rink facility. Adjacent to this lot is the actual fields of Gorsebrook Park which is also West of our proposed development.

Planning Principle 1: Transition

The inspiration and approach to massing for the proposed Wellington Street Tower is to act as a transitional element between the high-rise apartment building to the south and the three storey residence to the east. The building is broken into two distinct features:

- 1) A three storey podium, which looks to maintain the feel of townhouses with walk up apartments and landscaped front porches on the main level. The first three floors maintain and respect the existing street wall at street level, integrating the pedestrian-scaled, low-rise components of the adjacent properties on the street before the building step-backs to higher floors.
- 2) Above the podium, a distinct 5 storey, two-sided “tower” steps back from its podium and utilizes architectural breaks within the mass to give it a distinct character.

Planning Principle 2: Pedestrian Orientated

The building design prioritizes the needs and comforts of pedestrians by articulating the podium into distinct, house-like forms, expressed as townhouses that front on to Wellington Street. The townhouse forms are bordered with a strong frame, which reinforces the dimensions, pattern and rhythm of the prevailing context of existing low rise multi-family or R2A zoned properties to the North. The design intent is to perceive the townhouses as a collection of distinct elements, rather than a single, broad homogeneous mass, to better fit with the residential context and provide a more pleasing street experience and interaction.

These frames, along with projecting balconies, are designed to give prominence to the townhouse entrances. The ground level entrances, with transparent windows, low-fences and landscaped entrance porches, provide weather protection and a direct connection with the street for social interactions. This approach to fully engaging the street with porches, yards, gardens and activity is in keeping the existing porches, entries and living room windows that are prevalent along the street.

To mitigate against problems arising from street parking, two levels of underground parking are provided, for between 90 and 100 cars. This will ensure that cars are kept off the street, and eliminate the need for significant surface parking which would otherwise diminish the pedestrian experience.

Existing trees in the sidewalk boulevard will be replaced with new, to ensure the continuation of the mature street tree canopy. This will also enhance the pedestrian environment with some natural protection from the sun and wind.

Planning Principle 3: Human Scale

As previously mentioned, the overall design intention for the ground floor podium and townhouse elements is to break down the mass into elements that are more human scale. The materials have been carefully selected to reflect a residential material palette and detailing.

Front porch and balcony elements are expressed at each townhouse unit breaking up the mass into house scaled parts. High quality brick cladding and pavers define outdoor areas with low fence and gardens, reinforcing the residential scale and relate the building in a positive way to its surrounding residential context.

In order to better align with the existing residential massing in the neighbourhood, the mass of the podium aligns with the predominant orientation of the current residential properties and their relation to the street - close to sidewalk - as opposed to placing the building well back from the street to create an awkward inactive lawn, as other apartment buildings along the street have done. Our proposed massing and street connectivity serve to reinforce the existing street pattern, and maintain the lovely character of the existing street / sidewalk section.

The building also responds to its context by strategically placing these first three levels on the front face to the street. The massing has been broken down into smaller parts to match the three storey multi-residential that currently exists along the street, avoiding incompatible ground floor uses.

Planning Principle 4: Building Design

As previously noted, the overall objective of the building design is to be a transitional, bridging element between the abutting 15 storey high-rise apartment and the 3 storey R2A properties to the North. This has led us to compose the shape of the building into a dual tower form, utilizing architectural elements and breaks in the façade and soffit.

The base consists of a three storey high masonry podium with other architectural façade elements. The walk-up town-house elements front on to Wellington Street, with each one defined by a prominent metal panel frame, breaking down the length of the podium into six individual apartment units with street entry, matching the grain of the residential neighbourhood.

The façade reinforces the notion of a split form with a strong L-shaped metal panel frame. The frame turns to create a deep soffit crown. Balconies and window patterns are organized and expressed differently on the two tower forms creating more variation and visual interest at the skyline.

The scale, form and materials respond to the architectural character of the neighborhood, but with an eye towards the future. Consideration has also been given to express the top of the building as a design feature from the context of being viewed from across Gorsebrook Park

Planning Principle 5: Context Sensitive

The building's design respects the character of the surrounding neighborhood. The scale, form, and materials respond to the architectural character of the neighborhood and the contrasting height differentials between the adjacent neighbours. The proposed building's podium design directly responds and relates to surrounding residential context and character. The size proportion of the windows, the use of balconies and front porches, the alignment with the street-wall and high-quality materials contribute to this impression.

It is important to note that this area on this street is currently under review by HRM Planning. The proposed design does not detract from what is currently in existence, as the majority of properties adjacent and abutting Wellington street are older in nature and require substantial enhancement and refurbishment. The only newly constructed, modern properties reside at 1146 to 1152 Wellington St. There is no heritage designation, nor any buildings with any Colonial, Dutch, Victorian or Palladian styles to match to, hence those elements were not considered.

The building also responds to its context by strategically placing the three storey podium units on the front face to the street. The massing has been broken down into smaller parts to match the three storey multi-residential that currently exists along the street, avoiding incompatible ground floor uses. The podium and sidewalk street section has also been composed to match and continue the existing context of three storey buildings built right up to the sidewalk, effectively maintaining and reinforcing the context of the existing street-wall.

The setbacks of the three storey podium from the street are context sensitive, giving the podium a residential feel instead of a main floor commercial glass storefront podium. This aspect of the design is intentional, ensuring the street maintains its residential character with low rise setback at grade, while recognizing that the street has existing high density characteristics and the potential to serve even larger densities.

Sincerely,

Originally Signed

Keith Tufts
Principal