

PROJECT BRIEF

ROBIE + CUNARD 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 for a mixed-use building fronting Robie Street, Cunard Street, and Compton Avenue. 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 detailed building drawings including site plan, floor plans, elevations
2. 3D views / Renderings
3. Development Data
4. Traffic Impact Statement
5. Site Servicing Schematic

Context, Zoning & Existing Planning Designations

The subject property is zoned R2 under the current Land Use By-law and designated MDR under the Peninsula North Planning Area 1 of the Municipal Planning Strategy. There are 7 existing buildings on the subject site with a combined total of 22 apartment style units. In addition, the existing building at the Robie/Cunard corner houses 1000 square feet of localized commercial retail.

Adjacent properties at civic addresses 6029,6020,6015,6011 Cunard Street are zoned C-2A and have recently been subject to revitalized commercialization at grade. Remaining adjacent properties due west of the site within the residential block bound by Cunard Street and Compton Avenue include single family residences (primary on Compton) and multi-unit residences (primarily on Cunard). In addition, a 64 unit apartment has been built at the North-East corner of the Robie/Cunard intersection.

The site by virtue of its centralized location can be identified as a civic node. It fronts two major thoroughfares (Robie Street & Cunard Street), as well as a major public park (Halifax Commons). The site is within walking distance to existing amenities and services along Quinpool Road, and is in close proximity to Agricola Street where increased development and commercial revitalization is occurring. In addition, a metro transit shelter with multiple bus services is located at the Robie/Compton corner of the site.

Project Description + Design Strategies

The proposed development has identified Cunard Street as commercial corridor from adjacent pre-existing uses at grade. As such, the design has focused its commercial component along Cunard Street. In addition, commercial retail extends along Robie Street to further enhance neighbourhood compatibility and activate pedestrian streetscapes facing the park. At the corner of Robie and Compton, the building form shifts and sets back from the property line as an implied strategy to transition down to neighbouring low-density single family dwellings on Compton Avenue. The proposed building at this transition is characterized by a townhouse typology in 5 architectural forms with frontages, entries, and landscape elements facing Compton Avenue.

The primary pedestrian entry to the building is located on Robie Street and is identified and differentiated from commercial store fronts with accent coloured panels and large civic numbers for bold, clear way-finding. A secondary entrance is located off Cunard Street via a landscaped path that leads to the rear of the building whereby internal bike storage is quickly and easily accessed. Vehicular access to the below grade parking (2 levels) is at the South-West corner of the site off Compton Avenue as it has been assessed to have the least amount of traffic impact for adjacent roads.

The proposed building includes a total of 8 levels with various setbacks and terraced stepbacks as the building transitions in height. From the interior lot line, the building is setback approximately 52 feet to the 8-storey mass, 20 feet to the 5-storey mass, and 10 feet to the 4-storey mass (at Cunard). Step-backs for upper storey portions of the building above the street wall vary from 10-feet (Robie St) to 15-feet (Cunard) and 34-feet (Compton Ave).

Considering the width and boulevard nature of Robie Street, the proposed design establishes a continuous streetwall at 5-storeys tall. As the streetwall wraps around the Cunard Street corner, the mass steps down to 4-storeys to transition to lower neighboring buildings.

The upper 8 storeys are programmed with residential units with a focus on family type suites that make up over 30% of the overall 95 units. On level 500, an extensive 1,288 square feet of outdoor landscaped amenity terrace that faces Cunard Street.

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 and height limits restrict feasible high-quality architectural developments that would enrich and enhance neighbourhoods.
- Considering current economic and market trends, the current by-laws limit the densification of larger-sized units as set out by the Regional Plan to promote families moving and living in the urban core.
- The central location of the site is in immediate proximity to existing civic amenities including public transit (bus-stop on site), parks (Halifax Commons) and community centres (Olympic Centre, Emera Oval).
- The location of the site is within walking distance to Quinpool Road and Agricola Street corridors with existing and growing service plus commercial amenities.
- The site is at a highly visible corner on two major thoroughfares. In addition, the site is at the bookend of a MDR block that faces a large public park. These urban characteristics of the site in of itself can be identified as integral components to a formula for where appropriate density and successful developments should occur in any urban city.
- Existing properties no longer serve their original single family-use, and have been subdivided into walk-up apartment units largely due to the site's centralized location with accessibility to a wide range of civic and commercial amenities.
- Larger-scale developments can be identified within the immediate surroundings including multi-unit buildings along Cunard Street and Robie Street facing the Commons. In addition, there has been interest and applications submitted to HRM for high-density developments along Robie Street and Quinpool Road.
- Urban precedents from several major cities around the world indicate and dictate good urban form around public parks via increased height to 'frame' and 'enclose' public open space. In addition, successful developments around parks include mixed-use programming with commercial retail at grade to animate the streetscape which in turn promotes increased use and activity in and around the park. The proposed development clearly integrates these key urban design principals for enriched city living and urban revitalization around public space.
- The proposed design and programming is compatible with current and neighbouring use at grade, with primary commercial fabric evident along Cunard Street. Incorporating commercial use on both sides of Cunard Street further enhances the public activity within the pedestrian realm.

- Policies that allow for development agreements can regulate and promote proper urban and architectural design principals to ensure that new developments are built to the highest quality to promote 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,

Jacob JeBailey, Architect
RAIC, NSAA, OAA, M.Arch, BEDS

WM FARES ARCHITECTS
3480 Joseph Howe Dr, 5th Floor
Halifax, N.S. B3L 4H7
t. (902) 457-6676
f. (902) 457-4686