

Date: 2022-09-06

Subject: **Recommendation Report – Unlimited Height and Density**

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Report Number: Planning, Bld & Ec Dev-2022-800

Recommendations:

THAT the recommendation report titled, “Unlimited Height and Density” to the Planning and Development Committee meeting of September 26, 2022, be received;

THAT a public meeting be held to consider proposed unlimited height and density policies for the portion of the Urban Growth Centre outlined in Appendix 1; and

THAT staff report back to Planning and Development Committee following the public meeting to share feedback received, as well as recommendations for consideration.

Overview:

- **Brampton has been, and is projected to continue to be, one of the fastest growing communities in Canada over the next three decades. Pipeline development activity in Brampton has increased by 60 percent in Brampton since 2020. Brampton is anticipated to add 300K to 400K new residents by the year 2051.**
- **Through Brampton Plan, and work on the new Comprehensive Zoning By-Law and Urban Design Guidelines, the City is in the process of streamlining the development approvals process, and implementing a predictable planning regime, that will include clear identification of areas within the City of Brampton where we wish to direct growth, including taller and denser development.**
- **The Urban Growth Centre (hereinafter referred to as the ‘UGC’) is the geographic area within Brampton where the tallest and most dense**

buildings are intended to be directed. The greatest land area of the UGC exists along the Queen Street corridor where Bus Rapid Transit is planned. The UGC also includes the Downtown, where three higher order transit services intersect (Bus Rapid Transit, Light Rail Transit and commuter rail).

- **A portion of the UGC, excluding the downtown, is where a policy of Unlimited Height and Density (hereinafter referred to as 'UHD') is recommended to be directed.**

Background:

At the June 7th meeting of Planning and Development Committee, motion PDC090-2021 was carried as follows:

1. WHEREAS the City of Brampton has consistently been one of the fastest growing communities in Canada;
2. AND WHEREAS access to attainable and affordable housing options is increasingly out of reach to many residents of Brampton;
3. AND WHEREAS the City of Brampton wishes to attract investment, provide more housing options to residents, expand the tax base and build a vibrant and sustainable city;
4. AND WHEREAS the rapidly rising costs of land and building materials is impacting the ability of developers to purchase, develop and make a reasonable return on investment;
5. AND WHEREAS unlimited height and density policies exist in some GTA municipalities;
6. THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that Council for the City of Brampton directs staff to evaluate the merits of implementing unlimited height and density policies within the City of Brampton, including an evaluation as to whether staff recommend such policies to be applicable city-wide or scoped to a smaller geographic area.
7. FURTHER RESOLVED THAT staff bring forward any additional policies that could not only complement Council's direction to evaluate unlimited height and density policies, but also recommend alternative policies that could address Council's objectives;
8. AND FURTHER THAT staff report back to a Planning and Development Committee meeting in September, 2021, with recommendations for consideration by Council.

Current Situation:

The 2040 Vision, which is foundational to Brampton Plan, articulates a transition from low density car-oriented subdivisions to more urban, compact, mixed-use, transit-oriented and higher density places, organized around the principle of achieving 15-minute integrated neighbourhoods. The development community appears to be responding well to this shift and the City is receiving significant proposals across the city that are reflective of this approach.

The City of Brampton has been one of the fastest growing communities in Canada over the past few decades and by embracing a more urban approach to intensification, it is anticipated that Brampton will continue to be one of the fastest growing communities in Canada over the next three decades. To illustrate this point, as of June 17, 2022, there were 451 applications in the development pipeline, compared with 213 in 2020. Brampton does not appear to have an issue attracting development, the more important issue for Brampton is to manage growth in a manner that fulfills Term of Council priorities.

Significant Growth Anticipated to 2051

Brampton is transitioning from low density Greenfield development to higher intensity urban development. Over the next three decades it is anticipated that over 60% of development will be high density. Additionally, it is anticipated that approximately 40% of development will be in the form of intensification within the built-up area. It is also anticipated that approximately two thirds of new development will be directed to Strategic Growth Areas (Urban and Town Centres – including the UGC) and along key higher order transit corridors such as Queen Street, Hurontario Street and along future higher order transit corridors such as Steeles Avenue.

Brampton's total population in 2021 was 656,480, up from 593,638 in 2016. This reflects a 10.6 growth rate, more than double the growth rate of the Region of Peel, the Province of Ontario and Canada. Brampton's population is anticipated to grow to approximately 1M+ by 2051. As part of growth forecasting work for Brampton Plan, the city is anticipated to grow to a population range between 985K (Region of Peel's population forecast) and 1.1M (City of Brampton's population forecast), leading to anticipated population growth between 300K to 400K by 2051. To manage this growth, a shift to higher density urban forms will be required. Brampton Plan sets clear policy as to where this higher density development should be directed, and conversely, where it should not.

The Urban Growth Centre

The current Official Plan for the City of Brampton, as well as Brampton Plan, is intentional about trying to direct significant intensification to the Urban Growth Centre. The following Official Plan policies are particularly relevant:

3.2.1 General Policies

3.2.1.1 Development of greatest mass and highest densities must be located within the Urban Growth Centre and Central Area, along intensification corridors and within Mobility Hubs and Major Transit Station Areas. These areas shall:

- (i) Accommodate a significant portion of population and employment growth;*
- (ii) Provide a diverse and compatible mix of land uses, including residential and employment uses;*
- (iii) Provide high quality public open spaces;*
- (iv) Support transit, walking and cycling for everyday activities;*
- (v) Develop in a compact form that will efficiently use land and resources,*
- (vi) Optimize the use of existing and new infrastructure and services;*
- (vii) Contribute to minimizing potential impacts on air quality and promoting energy efficiency; and,*
- (viii) Achieve an appropriate transition of built form to adjacent areas.*

3.2.3.2 The Urban Growth Centre shall be planned to achieve a minimum density of 200 person and jobs combined per hectare by 2031 or before, measured over the entire gross area of the Urban Growth Centre.

3.2.3.3 Development within the Urban Growth Centre shall generally be designed to achieve development at 4 storeys and greater.

3.2.3.4 Opportunities to exceed the maximum height and/or density currently permitted within the Secondary Plan or Zoning By-law within the Central Area and Urban Growth Centre shall be considered subject to the provisions of section 5.12.

Given the direction of the Official Plan, should Council wish to enact Unlimited Height and Density, it is recommended that it be scoped to a portion of the Urban Growth Centre as identified in Appendix 1. This portion of the UGC is where additional height will best align with the 2040 Vision and Brampton Plan.

Urban Growth Centre – Downtown Special Policy Area

Currently, portions of Brampton’s downtown are subject to special policies to mitigate against flooding concerns. Until such time as the flooding issue is resolved and the special policies are removed, it is recommended that the downtown portion of the UGC be excluded from any consideration pertaining to application of an UHD policy regime.

Market Demand and Land Value

In cities that have implemented UHD policy regimes, there have been, not only urban design and planning implications, but also real estate market implications. The following discussion will provide an overview of some of the issues that are relevant to the City of Brampton when considering application of UHD.

The following factors influence land value:

- Market conditions: supply, demand and macro-economic factors such as employment and interest rates;
- Physical aspects of the site;
- Construction costs (both hard and soft); and
- Legal aspects – provincial, regional and City planning regime.

Establishing an UHD policy regime can artificially distort the factors that influence land values and fuel speculation. Land speculators buy land hoping it will go up in value. Developers take land and obtain necessary entitlements and permits, and builders build buildings. It is important for Brampton to be intentional about what we are trying to encourage and which policies favour which activities. Implementing UHD has the potential to incent land speculation, while not necessarily leading to getting buildings and communities built. Where it does result in buildings being built, one or two large buildings can absorb much of the market demand for a number of years, thereby extending the timeline for buildout of a community. If Council proceeds to enact an UHD regime, it will be important to monitor the impact that it has upon market conditions. The goal is to incent action and get buildings built in a manner that meets Council's city-building objectives and not fuel land speculation. This is something that will be monitored through the Growth Management Program.

Urban Design Considerations

While higher density development is desirable, particularly in areas that have requisite hard and soft infrastructure to support more intense development, (including higher order transit) it will be important to collaborate with the development community to overcome some of the common issues with tall towers noted below:

- A tendency to create marginal ground floor activation;
- Issues pertaining to microclimate – wind/shadows;
- Scale issues where buildings can overwhelm a place and make pedestrians feel uncomfortable;
- A trend in more suburban places where residents tend to interact with their parking garages, elevators, individual units and indoor amenities, versus interacting with the public realm; and
- Tall towers tend to be more about individual iconic, one-offs, rather than how they contribute to the quality of a larger community.

To mitigate against these issues, staff are in the process of preparing Tall Building Guidelines that will be used to help provide guidance to the development industry to deliver high quality buildings that contribute to active and engaging pedestrian environments.

Infrastructure Planning

One of the more challenging issues pertaining to application of UHD is infrastructure planning. Without an upset limit of what is anticipated to be developed, assumptions will need to be made by the City and Region through respective Growth Management Programs. While challenging, assumptions can be made based upon limiting factors. The Region of Peel has worked to plan infrastructure in Downtown Mississauga where UHD has been in place for approximately two decades. Typically, there will be some market conditions that will come into play, such as the cost of providing parking, market absorption rates, urban design considerations, etc., that will likely result in some standard buildings heights being realized under an UHD regime.

Despite familiarity working with an UHD regime in Mississauga, the Region of Peel has expressed concern about the application of this policy in Brampton, particularly if it is spread broadly. Therefore, it is recommended that it be scoped to only apply to the portion of the UGC as identified in Appendix 1.

Recommendations

To implement UHD within a portion of Brampton's UGC, amendments to the Official Plan and the Zoning By-Law will be required. The following is proposed:

Official Plan Amendments

That Secondary Plan Area 36 – Queen Street Corridor Secondary Plan be amended as follows:

1. To add an Unlimited Height and Density Special Policy Area (SPA) within the geographic boundary outlined in Appendix 1;
2. To add a policy that states development will be required to complete technical studies to the satisfaction of the City prior to the lifting of an 'H' Holding Provision. Studies can include but are not limited to the following:
 - Shadow impacts;
 - Transition of built-form to existing areas;
 - Potential buffers;
 - Traffic Impact Analysis;
 - Infrastructure Analysis, etc.; and
3. To amend all policies and appendices within the current Secondary Plan that reference height and density limits and replace them with unlimited height and density;

Zoning By-Law Amendments

To amend the Queen Street Mixed-Use Transition area as follows:

1. To remove all maximum height and density limits; and

2. To apply an 'H' Holding Provision to the proposed SPA that requires satisfactory completion of all technical studies prior to the lifting of the 'H' and prior to Site Plan approval.

Corporate Implications:

Financial Implications:

There are no direct financial implications associated with this report.

Other Implications:

There are no other implications associated with this report.

Term of Council Priorities:

This report aligns with the Official Plan Review and is related to the following Term of Council priority under the following:

Council Priority: A City of Opportunities
Strategic Priority: 1.4 Prioritize Jobs Within Centres
Project Number: 1.4.3 Develop a New Official Plan that aligns all master plans with Brampton 2040.

Conclusion:

Brampton is well positioned to absorb tremendous growth, while at the same time improving the livability of the city and quality of life for residents and business owners. A number of communities in Ontario have implemented UHD policy regimes with varying degrees of success. Should Council wish to implement an UHD policy regime, it is recommended that it be directed to the portion of the UGC as outlined in Appendix 1. Should Council wish to expand the application of UHD beyond the UGC, it is recommended that it be approached in a phased manner, in collaboration with the Region of Peel.

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Attachments:

Appendix 1 – Proposed Unlimited Height and Density Special Policy Area.