



Planning and Building Services

TOWN OF NEWMARKET
395 Mulock Drive
P.O. Box 328
Newmarket, ON L3Y 4X7

www.newmarket.ca
planning@newmarket.ca
905.953.5321

DEVELOPMENT AND INFRASTRUCTURE SERVICES PLANNING AND BUILDING SERVICES - PLANNING REPORT 2016-24

To: Committee of the Whole
Subject: Urban Design Review Options
Date: June 6, 2016
Origin: Planning Department

Recommendations

THAT Development and Infrastructure Services/Planning and Building Services Report 2016-24 dated May 30, 2016 regarding Urban Design Review Options be received and the following recommendation(s) be adopted:

1. THAT staff be directed to include in the 2017 budget a provision for contracting an urban design firm to prepare urban design standards to implement the policies of the Urban Centres Secondary Plan and the Official Plan;
2. AND THAT these urban design standards be applied by the selected consultant in review of development applications subject to established criteria;
3. AND THAT the cost of the engaged consultant be recouped through appropriate fees being collected from applicants upon the Fees and Charges by-law being amended to reflect the same;
4. AND THAT staff be directed to review a structure and the necessary resources for a professional urban design review panel at such time as development activity warrants it.

Purpose of this Report

This report lays out the role of urban design in the Urban Centres Secondary Plan and Official Plan, options for urban design review, and next steps for the Town in moving toward a more thorough urban design review process.

Background

Secondary Plan

Council adopted the Newmarket Urban Centres Secondary Plan as the guiding document for the Yonge Street and Davis Drive corridors to build on the policies of the Official Plan. The policies of the Secondary Plan will guide these areas from their current state of primarily low-rise commercial properties toward the renewal and redevelopment of the area through the introduction of new built forms. These will include taller buildings, new mixed use areas, and a greater mix of uses than is currently the case. Each of these new urban elements will need to be carefully designed to ensure that they fit into their local contexts, are sensitive to the surrounding land uses, and help the district to achieve the Plan's vision for a vibrant, liveable, walkable part of Newmarket.

The Secondary Plan sets out policies related to Urban Design to guide the design, development, and approval of redeveloped properties. These policies are specific, addressing elements such as shadow and wind impacts, ensuring street-facing entrances and facades, angular planes, streetscaping, lighting, parking facility design, and more. The Official Plan also provides guidance on good urban design principles to be required across Newmarket, and it should be recognized that as development will occur outside of the Secondary Plan area a high quality of urban design should be expected and required in both the Secondary Plan area and across the entire town. Having a complete set of urban design standards would increase the specificity and enforceability of these policies. For example, while Secondary Plan policies speak to the need for buildings that address the street, more specific standards would create detail for orientation of entrances and coordination of their location with the local context, designing the pedestrian-level façades to avoid blank or glazed windows and provide street animation, ensure accessible and attractive streetscape-building transition areas, and integrate with other policies related to public art and sustainability.

The Town's current planning staff are experienced in a range of areas of specialization in urban planning, including development, heritage, policy, and one staff member is certified in urban design. However, urban design is a unique profession that integrates the design skills of an architect or landscape architect with the vision and policy integration of a planner.

Implementation

The Town has retained a consulting team to prepare a zoning by-law to assist with the implementation of the Secondary Plan. Many elements of the Plan can be implemented through zoning – heights, densities, land use, broad controls on built form, and more. However, zoning is a broad tool that is not well suited to controlling urban design due to the need for highly context-specific design and the interpretation and implementation of urban design policies and best practices on a site-by-site basis. While zoning will address many of the policies of the Secondary Plan, consideration of the urban design policies in development review is important to ensure that the Yonge Street and Davis Drive urban centres, and development across the entire town, feature the highest quality possible of urban design.

Further detail and refinement of the urban design policies into more detailed standards is required, along with the establishment of a more rigorous review of development applications for their adherence to adopted urban design requirements and good design practice.

Options

There are different tools that may be used in order to conduct a review of development application as they relate to urban design.

Option 1: Status Quo

Currently staff review development applications for good urban design as part of the development review process. However, lacking detailed standards for urban design or requirements in an adopted zoning by-law, staff have little authority to require applicants and developers to modify their proposals. For example, developments may meet the requirements of zoning by adhering to height, density, and setback requirements under existing zoning, but still orient their buildings and design their facades in such a way that undermines the goals of a street-facing, pedestrian-oriented, lively streetscape.

Maintaining a staff review of development applications for urban design would add no additional budget cost, not add significantly to review timelines, but would not bring additional design-specific professional advice.

Option 2: A Contract Urban Designer to Review Plans

Contracting an urban design professional or firm to provide design recommendations on development applications on an as-needed basis is an option that keeps added costs low while adding expertise. Applications would be circulated to the contracted designer/firm as part of the standard commenting and review period, and their fees added to the fees to be paid by the applicant. This is an approach consistent with other areas of expertise, and is currently employed for development applications regarding tree preservation, wherein applications are circulated to a consulting arborist for comment on tree protection, enhancement, and replacement, and the associated cost billed to the applicant.

Maintaining a contract urban designer would avoid added cost to the Town and the need for additional staff time, but would raise the cost of development applications and place the timeliness of response comments increasingly in the responsibility of external consultants.

Option 3: A Contract Urban Designer to Review Plans & Develop Staff Review Processes

Contracting an urban design professional in concert with dedicating an appropriate staff person with a background in urban design can help to immediately increase urban design review capacity while developing appropriate guidelines, review processes, and internal staff capacity to take on urban design review. This option is similar to Option 2, however it has an objective of phasing out the contracted urban designer in favor of Town staff taking over the urban design role in the medium to long term.

Option 4: Professional Urban Design Review Panel

A professional urban design review panel is a tool that has been successfully implemented by cities like Calgary, Ottawa, and Toronto. Such a panel would consist of professionals from fields related to urban design such as architects, landscape architects, accessibility experts, heritage professionals, urban planners, designers, as well as an appropriate staff person. This option would provide diverse professional advice from a range of fields. It is unlikely that current Secondary Plan area site plan applications are sufficient to warrant a full design review panel at this time. Empaneling such a group may pose a challenge without some form of adequate remuneration or recognition.

Maintaining a professional urban design review panel has the potential to add to review timelines by tying approvals to an additional meeting schedule based on the availability of the members of the panel. This option also adds to administrative workload through ensuring proper preparation and public notice for meetings. Budget may be required for honoraria, travel expenses for panel members, and other matters.

Option 5: Community Volunteer Advisory Panel

A community volunteer advisory panel would consist of community members with backgrounds in fields related to urban design such as architects, landscape architects, accessibility experts, heritage professionals, urban planners, designers, as well as an appropriate staff person. This option presents many of the same benefits as the professional design review panel, although would be highly dependent on the skill level of the volunteers. Creating a review group comprised of residents also offers a benefit of increased public engagement in planning.

Maintaining a community volunteer advisory panel has the potential to add to review timelines by tying approvals to an additional meeting schedule based on the availability of the members of the panel. This option also adds to administrative workload through ensuring proper preparation and public notice for meetings.

Option 6: Urban Designer on Staff

Hiring a full-time urban designer would see all urban design review take place by a new member of staff. This would not increase existing approval timelines, and a portion of the cost could be borne through increased fees of development applications. It is unlikely that current Secondary Plan area site plan applications are sufficient to warrant a full-time member of staff focusing solely on urban design. If a new staff member versed in a range of planning areas were to be hired, they may be able to contribute to increased review of policy and development in other areas of the town, improving the functions of other areas of the Planning Department.

Preferred Option

Given the current volume of development applications in the Secondary Plan area, it is not warranted to pursue full design panels or full-time members of staff. Additionally, more thorough review than is currently employed of urban design is required to implement the Secondary Plan policies. Regardless of the option pursued, more detail is required in the principles of urban design desired for the Yonge Street and Davis Drive areas. This is best accomplished in lower volumes by a contract urban designer or urban design firm and in larger volumes by a professional urban design review panel.

Additionally, it is important to integrate a more complete design review process with the ongoing work to review the zoning in the Secondary Plan area and the site plan approval process. Urban design review is closely connected to these processes, and should be considered in conjunction with their ongoing review.

It is recommended that staff be directed to include in the 2017 budget such costs as will be required to engage the services of a contract urban designer or urban design firm to first draft more detailed urban design standards, and second to employ these standards in the review of development applications.

This will provide a more thorough review of development applications as site plan application volumes increase. As the standards are completed and volumes reach levels at which a full urban design review panel is warranted, staff will report back to Committee with a more detailed approach for how such a body would be created and managed.

Community consultation policy

Residents, businesses, and the development community were consulted on the principles of urban design intended for the Yonge Street and Davis Drive urban centres as part of the development and approval of the Urban Centres Secondary Plan. If urban design standards are developed, they may be the subject of further and more detailed public consultation.

Budget impact

Budget will be required to develop the urban design guidelines and this amount will be included as part of the 2017 budget deliberations. Depending on which direction Council prefers, future operating budgets may require additional funding to resource the appropriate urban design review process.

Business plan and strategic plan linkages

Creating a strategy for vibrant and livable corridors along Davis Drive and Yonge Street

- Prepare a redevelopment-ready strategy
- Implement the Urban Centres Secondary Plan

Contact

For more information on this report, contact: Ted Horton, Planner at 905-953-5321, Extension 2458 or via email at thorton@newmarket.ca.



Planner



Director of Planning and Building Services



Commissioner Development and Infrastructure Services