

Parish Lane Development Focus Group Session Report

January 31, 2020

Introduction: A focus group session was organized with representatives from invited key stakeholders. It was part of a three phase public engagement process on the Parish Lane Condominium Development proposal sponsored by Heritage NL and Happy City. Its purpose was to delve deeper into the results of an online survey and to identify potential solutions to public concerns that were expressed through the survey and the public meeting organized by the city. Following an overview of the online survey results participants of the focus group were divided into 3 teams and asked to brainstorm on possible ideas for strengthening the proposal and addressing public concerns and ideas. At the end of the session each group was asked to develop up to 3 “Opportunity Cards” that drew key ideas from the brainstorming session. These cards asked the following questions: issue or opportunity that was being addressed; an idea for strengthening the proposal; thoughts about how the recommendation could be actioned (e.g., resources, programs, agencies that could help).

1. Protection of Views (from The Rooms and of neighbouring iconic buildings)

The Rooms Corporation and members of the public expressed a strong desire to preserve the unimpeded views of downtown St. John’s and the harbour from The Rooms.

- Reduce height (e.g., by a minimum of 1.8 metres)*
- Reduce height by 1-2 storeys and redistribute density elsewhere on property*
- Make clear what the options are and solicit views on them
- Apply new City Plan objectives to Heritage Ecclesiastical District with commitment sought to protect heritage values
- Have developer meet with The Rooms to alleviate their concerns
- Put a walkable park-like viewpoint on Harvey Rd (i.e., add viewing opportunities in addition to those offered by The Rooms)
- Create additional simulation tools to allow stakeholders to analyze impacts on views*
- Preserve panoramic views of city
- Consider both small & large views

2. Minimize Impact on the National Heritage District/Townscape & Preserve Heritage Character

The St. John’s Ecclesiastical District National Historic Site recognizes the concentration of very significant ecclesiastical buildings that include churches, monasteries, schools, convents, and other structures. The roofs and towers of these structures form iconic landmarks from various points in downtown and contribute to the over all character of the city’s cultural landscape. Those who wish to preserve heritage and tourism values of the district and the historic core -- including those who see potential for the nomination of the area as a World Heritage Site under

UNESCO -- wish to ensure that any development in the area support and protect these heritage qualities.

- The developer make a financial contribution toward the preservation of the district
- Design the building to use less glass and incorporate into design the dormer peaks on Queen's Road
- Ensure building is in scale in its form and cladding to the original Parish Hall design*
- Reuse heritage building elements in a more meaningful way (e.g., as an entrance)
- Break up massing to reference the residential neighbourhood rather than The Rooms with its monumental roofs
- Replicate shape of former Parish Hall
- Develop a master plan for the Kirk site and old Holloway School
- Focus massing of site on hall site/gravel pit
- Make it nice to walk by (e.g., visual appeal from street)
- Have more input from Heritage NL
- Ensure that cultural appeal of district is maintained as the district is an important tourism asset
- Get an assessment of possible impact of the proposal on the potential for World Heritage Site status
- Developer issue statement that they will study World Heritage Site requirements and not take action that will negatively impact the potential for designation
- Do not incorporate "faux" heritage design
- The building finishes are the most important
- Connect the green space to the view
- Ensure that the Kirk isn't cut off or isolated by the development
- Keep development on Queen's Rd in scale with church buildings
- Incorporate Parks Canada recommendations once review completed

3. Inclusion of Affordable Housing and Amenities for the Public

A significant number of people in the online survey expressed a preference for affordable housing to be included as part of the Parish Lane development while others suggested the potential for including some public/commercial amenities that would contribute to a lively neighbourhood that would ensure a strong, pedestrian-friendly address on public streets (Queen's Rd. and Harvey Rd.)

- Create a storefront on Harvey Rd
- Integrate below-market/subsidized units on Queen's Rd integrate in an historic design*
- Integrate semi-public function on street fronts (e.g., commercial)**
- Developer support development of affordable housing or halfway house elsewhere*
- Explore public funding for affordable housing/engage city's Affordable Housing Working Group to brainstorm on possibilities for affordable housing
- Quality affordable housing combined with high end condos

- Units without parking are less profitable
- Consider a mixed-use development

4. Public Address on Queen's & Harvey Roads/Treatment of Parish Hall Building Elements

Under the current proposal, the Queen Street façade partially comprises the blank façade of a parking garage, a trend which is seen in many of the commercial proposals for downtown St. John's. Blank facades and parking garages on public streets tend to make them less appealing places to walk and, in some instances, remove commercial and other public uses from the street. The City of St. John's has requested that some of the original elements of the Anglican Parish Hall be preserved. How is this done in a meaningful way that integrates with the proposal?

- Queen's Rd must have more "life" – move parking garage behind street level residential units or other useful building area
- Undertake engineering assessment of the integrity of the building archway and the residence and explore potential for development and preservation
- Create community space
- Develop information panels on the former Parish Hall
- Maintain architectural vocabulary of existing buildings along Queen's Rd (use of brick and window patterning)
- Move building line right up to Queen's Rd (i.e., in line with existing parish house and original entrance to parish hall)
- Save parish residence and original hall entrance if possible
- Have doors [public address] on Harvey Rd to make it feel safer*

5. Potential Impacts on Neighbouring Residents

Neighbouring residents, particularly those on Garrison Hill, expressed some of the strongest concerns about the proposal. Much of the focus was on the protection of existing green space and trees which most residents see as a benefit or amenity of living in the area. Other negative comments reflected the fact that the proposal is of a different scale than the existing residential neighbourhood. Protections of views and the potential of shading of a high tower were also expressed.

- Does a good job of keeping back from houses [on Garrison Hill] but could be lower to minimize shadow and wind impacts
- Potential new members for church
- Incorporate community gardens for neighbourhood residents or another green space access through an agreement
- Have a community benefit agreement for Queen's Rd public access > [public] housing/ small community space
- Concern about their access too narrow [of neighbors?]
- Hold meeting of all owners (Holloway School property, Kirk, MacDonald, etc.)

- Shift main tower further west to minimize shadowing of Garrison Hill houses and to maximize green space
- Look at NIMBY Tool kit by Home Builder's Assoc.
- Provide community/retail space and transit on Harvey Rd = happier locals
- Put tower on top of proposed parking to maximize green space
- \$ economics
- keep green space and trees as a buffer

6. Protection of/Public Access to Green Space

Through the consultation process there was considerable concern/interest, particularly from local residents, in protecting the trees/open spaces on the site along with public access to them.

- Increase the number of trees salvaged or commit to plant one tree for every removed in the downtown area
- Increase access to and potential use of green space. It is currently used by neighbours but not otherwise a public space**
- Develop an access agreement with residents whose backyards access the green space
- Undertake an inventory of wildlife in the green space
- Develop way finding [and historical interpretive] signage (history of site includes: occupation dates to 1700; home to Anglican Society of the Gospel; Bishop Feilds denominational school; Anglican Academy)
- Create a public laneway access through the green space and a public square with water feature
- integrate circulation with Kirk property (roads and paths)
- inside/outside inclusion

7. Parking

The proposal currently exceeds the city's requirements for parking spaces. There were public expressions that decreasing the number of spaces could allow for the strengthening of other aspects of the proposal (e.g., street address; more green space)

- reduce parking to legal minimum and include spaces for bicycles
- exempt from parking minimum
- provide EV chargers for residents that could be used by others if not occupied by them
- Hide parking under the building
- Eliminate/minimize surface parking to provide more green space**

8. Other

From the focus group there emerged a small number of suggestions that didn't neatly fit into any of the above categories but are worth considering:

- Ensure that none of the bricks from the demolished parish hall go to landfill
- Get churches talking to each other
- There needs to be an Ecclesiastical District plan

Top Ideas: Opportunity Cards

Issue/Opportunity	Recommendation	Supports
1. Improve public realm along Queen's Rd	- incorporate historic interpretation boards -incorporate below market residential units at street level OR boardroom rentals OR co-working space OR start-up space	Habitat for Humanity; MUN Genesis Centre
2. Increase access to and potential use of green space to make it an organized public space	- build on vision of public access via staircase, incorporate inclusiveness for all ages at landscape design stage	Atlantic Provinces Association of Landscape Architects Incorporate landscape design into charette
3. Include that the potential of historic buildings in Ecclesiastical District to access Parks Canada cost-shared funding for conservation are not negatively impacted	-incorporate any comments from Parks Canada into the development	Parks Canada
4. Increase landscaped green space and reduce number of parking spaces	-find alternate parking locations nearby instead of surface parking AND create new transit infrastructure	-Metro Park and Metrobus
5. Support more affordable housing/mixed use development in the city	-explore co-investment funds (CMHC) to offer affordable housing as part of development	Affordable Housing Working Group
6. Rethink approach to parking in proposal	-dedicated EV infrastructure (public?); pooled parking with other sites; more underground parking; reduced parking spaces to minimum; unbundle from units	Metro Park
7. To ensure that built form is fitting and appealing	-use more of the form of the historic church hall on Queen's Rd frontage	Parks Canada Heritage NL
8. Activate retail/neighbourhood vitality – public zone	Include space on Queen's Rd for street level retail/community space and amenity	City St. John's zoning
9. Protect panoramic view from The Rooms/Harvey Rd	Reduce building height and undertake independent assessment of view plane	City working with developer