

265 Catherine Street – Building Heights Addendum

This letter report has been prepared at the request of the City Staff processing the Zoning Bylaw and Official Plan Amendment and Site Plan applications submitted for the property at 265 Catherine Street that is proposed to be developed by Brigil with a mixed-use development comprising 1,129 residential units. Specifically, staff have requested that additional rationale be provided for the proposed building heights.

As context and as detailed in the Planning Rationale report prepared in support of the Zoning Bylaw and Official Plan Amendment applications, the current zoning on the site was approved as a site-specific rezoning to permit a development concept contemplated by the previous Owner of the site in 2012. The current zoning allows for a mixed-use development with three high rise towers ranging from 19 storeys, 23 storeys and 25 storeys. This zoning aligned with the Centertown Secondary Plan directions for the site that were established in the late 1970s and refreshed through a secondary planning study that was initiated in mid 2010 and approved by Council in May 2013.

As part of the new Official Plan adopted by City Council in 2021 and the Province in 2022, the Central and East Downtown Core Secondary Plan was created. This Secondary Plan carried forward unchanged the policies of the Centertown Secondary Plan (2013). The Centertown area is now considered to be part of the broader downtown area of the city. The previous Official Plan defined the Downtown or Central Area as being the area generally north of Gloucester Street and extending from Lebreton Flats to the Byward Market area, the Rideau/Congress Center area and the Sandy Hill area west of King Edward Avenue and south of Laurier Avenue. The broader downtown area now identified in the Official Plan includes the entire Centertown neighborhood, the entire Sandy Hill Neighborhood, the Byward Market and entire Lowertown area to the Rideau River, and the Chinatown and Little Italy areas to the O-Train Corridor in addition to the areas that comprised the Central Area in the previous Official Plan.

Although the previous Centertown Secondary Plan was incorporated into the new Official Plan as part of the Central and East Downtown Core Secondary Plan, there was no detailed review undertaken on how it was aligning with the broad policy directions of the new Plan. In this regard, the new Official Plan identifies the downtown area as being the most intense mixed-use area within the city where a high concentration of high-rise development including the highest buildings in the city would be located in support of strengthening the downtown as the central node of the city. The area now defined as the downtown is characterized as a highly walkable area well served by transit and supporting travel by multiple sustainable transportation modes – walking, cycling, transit. As such, while the site might not be at a Hub as defined in the new Official Plan, the entire Downtown area due to its urban fabric, dynamic mix of uses and focus on supporting sustainable transportation can be considered a Hub in itself.

The new Official Plan with its focus to strengthen existing 15 minute walkable communities with increased opportunities for mixed use and higher intensity residential development with an emphasis on achieving high urban design standards and urban open spaces to support high quality urban living, also aligns with the overarching directions of the Province as set out in the Provincial Policy Statement and as reflected through more recent initiatives by the Province to support increased housing supply, especially in areas that are characterized and developed as dynamic urban mixed-use areas.

The planning context where the Centertown neighborhood is now considered to be a part of the downtown supports looking for opportunities to achieve more intense development beyond what was contemplated by the Secondary Plan where it can be demonstrated that a site is suited to and can support more intense, including higher profile development and where such a development can make a positive contribution to strengthening the image and identity of the Downtown as a dynamic liveable mixed-use community. The Catherine Street site is considered a site where more intense development can be supported. It represents an opportunity for a full block to be developed in a way that allows the development to make a positive contribution to the fabric of the southern edge of the Downtown area in proximity to the Highway 417 Corridor without identifying itself as an automobile dependent development. The proposed development will include through block connections and a new urban park and positions the proposed towers on podiums that will contribute to creating human scale street environments and includes lower profile town-house type development along the Arlington Avenue edge to provide for sensitive integration of the project with a residential streetscape that is consistent with the fabric of existing low-profile areas that generally are north of the site. The presence of larger buildings on podiums in the location of the site would help mitigate noise issues for the wider community. The proposal in many ways sets the stage for achieving the redefinition of Catherine Street, currently characterized as a mixed, quasi-industrial area between the 417 and the more residential areas of the Centertown community into an urban corridor that provides for transforming the street into a dynamic urban street with mixed-use street-oriented development and increased residential population.

The Central and East Downtown Core Secondary Plan carried forward directions from the refreshed Centertown Secondary Plan adopted by Council in 2013 for Catherine Street. These did not account for specific opportunities represented by different sites relative to site size and more detailed context considerations (as was done for the Montreal Road Secondary Plan). The other locations where development at the scale proposed for the site are allowed include the southwestern gateway to the downtown at Carling Avenue and Preston Street where development up to 55 storeys is allowed, for the western gateway to the downtown at Albert/Scott Street where towers up to 65 storeys are allowed, for the southeastern gateway to the downtown in the Lees Avenue area where development of towers up to 45 storeys are allowed and for the eastern gateway area to the downtown at the Cummings Bridge at River Road/Montreal Road where buildings up to 37 storeys are allowed. These locations are considered gateway sites that are large and generally are located at the edges of existing communities.

Allowing for such scales of development at these locations, in addition to fitting within the Central Area View lines for protecting the visual prominence of the Parliament Buildings, is related to the ability of the sites to also make significant contributions to the urban fabric such as with through block connections, the inclusion of urban parks and providing for highly animated human scale street edge conditions. The proposal for the site exhibits these characteristics and like the other sites that are gateway sites, also provides for such a gateway condition to be developed to define Ottawa's skyline at the southern edge of the Downtown.

The success of the project in supporting the high-rise development proposed and the positive human scale condition being created along the street edges was recognized by the Urban Design Review Panel. As reflected in the comments from the UDRP, the focus of comments/suggestions was to further explore

opportunities to strengthen the human scale design treatments and at grade public spaces. The UDRP did not express concerns with the proposed tower heights.

In summary, the proposal for the site and the heights proposed:

- aligns with the overarching objectives expressed through the Secondary Plan for the transformation of Catherine Street from its current quasi-industrial character to a more urban condition to strengthen the urban fabric of Centretown.
- aligns with the directions of the new Official Plan that includes Centertown within the Downtown with policies for the strengthening of the area with high density, high profile mixed-use development that increases population.
- aligns with directions of the Province supporting intense development to increase housing supply in urban areas with a particular focus to intensify residential development.
- can be accommodated on the site due to the site's size and context, and the opportunity represented by the site for a full block redevelopment where key features to provide for strong integration of the site into its urban fabric can be achieved – through block connections, open space and parks areas, human scale animated street edge elements, towers positioned in way where they are not dominating the surrounding streets but buffer the neighbourhood from Hwy 417 noise
- fits within the urban fabric and skyline evolving for the Downtown where the highest profile developments are located on the periphery to allow for achieving increased intensity of development while also ensuring that the symbolic primacy and visual integrity of the Parliament Buildings will not be eroded as a result of having the highest development in the city located in the Downtown.

To this point, this letter report on the height proposed for this project has concentrated on augmenting the Planning Rationale Report submitted in support of the applications before the City for the site with a focus on the planning policy that the project will be reviewed against and evaluated on to demonstrate how it conforms with and confirms key directions of the City and Province for development of the site. There is another element that is also important to explore and that is that the added height will enable Brigil to provide a number of meaningful and important community benefits.

First and foremost, it is noted that Brigil has received overwhelmingly positive feedback regarding the public amenities being proposed as part of the redevelopment project. In community visioning sessions, consultations, and meetings with community leaders, these public amenities have been met with enthusiastic support. Of particular note is Brigil has determined that that these public amenities supported by the community are being made possible due to the added height and increased intensity of development sought over and above what could be achieved under the current 25-storey zoning. Councillor Troster underscored this point during the October 11, 2023, public consultation meeting noting the trade-offs between increased height with more intense development and increased public amenities at ground level. Stakeholders praised Brigil for their public engagement and willingness to incorporate the community feedback into their project planning. They have also highlighted the deep need in the neighbourhood for public space and the public park, which is proposed. Finally, it is also important to note Brigil's responsiveness to public feedback. Putting commentary on the tower height aside, Brigil has

adapted its plan to meet every request for adjustments that were made by the Centretown Community Association and the Councillor's office.

The public good represented by this project, is in many ways embodied within the following project features that are being made possible as a result of the added height and associated increased development intensity:

- 1) 4,000 square feet of flexible market space (facing Arlington Avenue) that can be utilized by the community for farmers markets, art shows, community events, concerts and more.
- 2) 10% of lot space allocated to a public park – which will be one of the only City-owned green spaces in the neighbourhood.
- 3) Exceeding the 25% minimum open and accessible space requirements – projected now at 30% open space.
- 4) Creating a walking pass-through space for residents and the public, enabling the public to engage with the development even as non-residents, and
- 5) Reduced heights along Arlington Avenue to better adapt to the low-rise nature of the surrounding neighbourhood.

Second, the following features which have been added to the current plan, as a response to public feedback:

- 1) Exceeding landscape tree requirements – stemming from a request from the community for added greenery.
- 2) Hosting upwards of 10 car sharing spaces in underground parking spaces.
- 3) Adding approximately 100 affordable housing units.
- 4) Creating retail space focused on attracting local and small business.
- 5) Dedicating space to exhibits by local artists.
- 6) The addition of public bathrooms to the site.
- 7) Equal bike parking spaces to residential units – with a reduction in car parking spaces to 245 residential spaces representing a ratio of .22 per unit to support the communities concern about increased car traffic from the development; and
- 8) Space set aside for a grocery store – which is something Brigil agrees will add vibrancy to the community if secured.

At this stage, Brigil firmly believes that this project submission has balanced investing in the needs of the community, incorporating feedback from stakeholders, and planning a walk-able sustainable, and vibrant project. However, as with all projects, changes to planned amenities and density impact the economic assumptions of the developer and may require new analysis. It remains Brigil's goal to proceed with the project as described in this submission and is looking forward to ongoing engagement with the City of Ottawa to finalize the required approvals.