Downtown Hamilton Tall Buildings Study
Community Meeting

Study Overview

WHY ARE WE HERE?

As part of the review of the Secondary Plan for Downtown Hamilton, the City is carrying out a Tall Building Study to create a set of tall building guidelines to help guide future development.

PURPOSE OF THE TALL BUILDINGS STUDY:

• To determine appropriate locations for tall buildings in Downtown Hamilton
• To develop a set of guidelines for how tall buildings should be evaluated to ensure they fit in with their surrounding area
• To update and strengthen the policy direction in the Downtown Hamilton Secondary Plan for tall buildings

WE WANT TO HEAR FROM YOU:

Alissa Mahood, MCIP, RPP, Senior Planner
City of Hamilton
alissa.mahood@hamilton.ca
905-546-2424 ext. 1250
71 Main Street West, 6th Floor

For more information visit our website:
www.hamilton.ca/downtownhamiltonreview

Study Schedule

We Are Here

Next Steps
The Tall Buildings Study will be guided by the following Principles:

1. Tall Buildings form an integral part of Downtown Hamilton.

2. The form, shape and height of Tall Buildings should be shaped to mitigate potential negative impacts.

3. Tall Buildings within Downtown Hamilton should respond to the unique topography and landscape, including the Escarpment and the Waterfront.

4. Tall Buildings within Downtown Hamilton should support the creation of a robust public realm network, including parks, streets and plazas.

5. Tall Buildings should be located in a fashion that preserves key views and termini both to and from the Downtown.

6. The location, shape and form of Tall Buildings should respond to the surrounding neighbourhood context.

7. The shape and form of Tall Buildings should respond to and respect existing heritage buildings and districts.

8. Tall Buildings should be designed in a way that mitigates the negative impacts of climatic conditions (wind and sun).

9. Additional height should be considered as an incentive to realize related policy objectives.

10. Location of Tall Buildings should be informed by Transit Infrastructure.
The ten tallest existing buildings within and surrounding Hamilton’s Downtown are identified on the map. The majority of these (7) are between 22 and 25 storeys tall. The remaining three are 25, 33 and 43 storeys tall respectively.

The existing Downtown Hamilton Secondary Plan includes clearly defined height limits. These have been reinforced by additional regulations around height that form part of the James Street North Mobility Hub Study Area. The Downtown Secondary Plan also allows for exceptions to the height limit where certain impacts (shade and wind) are lessened.
The Character Area Framework describes the predominant character and appropriate built form for different areas of the Downtown. Buildings within the Character Areas generally share common building forms and relationships with the public realm (i.e. streets, public spaces, parks).

The Character Areas were developed with input from the public, the Staff Technical Advisory Committee, the Design Review Panel and the Community Liaison Committee.

The creation of a vibrant, mixed-use Downtown requires identifying priorities and elements that require special attention. These should respond to the unique context and vision for each of the Character Areas within the Downtown.

The visual direction for each Character Area is illustrated on the following panels and demonstrates key elements that need to be considered as redevelopment occurs including: built form of buildings, relationship with the public realm, character area priorities and urban design strategies.
Character Area Design Priorities

PRIME RETAIL STREETS - JAMES ST. & KING ST.

The vision for the Prime Retail Streets is to complete the street-wall and provide an uninterrupted building line at the street level through redevelopment and infill development along the corridor.

Prime Retail Streets represent the traditional commercial districts of Downtown Hamilton. Buildings along streets like James Street North and parts of King Street are typically 3-4 storeys tall and house a variety of shops that support the local economy and facilitate a vibrant street life. Preserving and enhancing this street life is important.

In order to retain the character of the area, new development shall meet the following design priorities:

a. New buildings shall match the street-wall height of existing buildings.

b. Any taller building masses shall be sufficiently stepped back from the street to avoid interface with the perceived massing of the street as a low-rise corridor.

c. New development shall not increase the average extent of shadows on sidewalks of commercial areas.

d. Buildings shall be built tight to the street-line and align with adjacent façades.

e. The articulation of façades shall retain the scale of the storefront shops in its surroundings.

f. As per the Secondary Plan, ground floors will predominantly be occupied by street oriented commercial uses. Therefore, the ground floor frontage shall be clearly articulated in the massing of the façade, substantially glazed with generous floor to floor heights and designated to accommodate signage.

g. Upper floors of buildings along King Street and James Street shall include a variety of uses (office, commercial, residential and live/work arrangements) which will be reflected by the diversity in the façade.

h. New buildings shall use façade solutions compatible with existing materials: brick, stone, decorative treatments, etc.

i. No additional on-street parking will generally be granted; new development shall provide sufficient, parking either underground or at the rear of the property.

j. Loading areas shall be located off of the retail street.

KEY FINDINGS:
The existing zoning generally captures the City’s vision for the area in terms of heights and land use. Deeper lots in this area offer an opportunity for infill with taller buildings, provided that their presence enhances the character of the area.
Character Area Design Priorities

DOWNTOWN CORE (Civic Precinct)

The vision for the Downtown Core is to activate the pedestrian realm through the intensification of the area, which shall allow for improvements and expansions to the open space network.

The Downtown Core (Civic Precinct) is already home to some of Hamilton’s tallest buildings. It is the best place for new tall buildings and intensification because it is well connected to transit and served by many facilities: City Hall, the Theatre, Art Gallery of Hamilton, Hamilton Public Library and Market, FirstOntario Centre, the Convention Centre, and Jackson Square. In this area, the design of towers will need to limit the impact of shade and wind.

In order to have a positive impact in the pedestrian realm, new development shall meet the following design priorities:

a. All development shall focus on the street.

b. New buildings shall be built to the street-line; additional setbacks may be permitted with the purpose of accommodating useful and well-integrated amenities and landscaping.

c. Active uses shall be located at grade, including retail, entertainment uses and amenity areas.

d. Redevelopment of the Jackson Square Complex shall redesign the blank building façades and re-orient the Complex toward the surrounding streets.

e. Outdoor amenity areas associated with new development shall be coordinated with and complement the existing open space network.

f. Setbacks, stepbacks, recesses, canopies and other massing techniques shall be employed in order to limit the impact of shade and wind onto pedestrian spaces.

g. New tall buildings shall be spaced apart from existing towers to avoid wind tunnels, and oriented in such way that will not compromise the privacy of their neighbours.

h. Surface parking shall not be allowed.

i. Loading areas shall be consolidated and centralized underground, where possible.

KEY FINDINGS:

While the existing zoning allows for heights between 6 and 15 storeys, the Downtown Secondary Plan also allows for exceptions to the height limit where certain impacts (shade and wind) are lessened. Some properties of the Downtown Core Character Area have enough space available to mitigate impact of shadow and wind and therefore may be suitable for additional height than what is currently permitted.
Character Area Design Priorities

THE GORE

The vision for the Gore is to maintain and emphasize its architectural heritage character while retaining and enhancing the public open space attributes of Gore Park.

As Downtown Hamilton’s primary open space, the Gore requires special attention. The blocks surrounding the Gore already include some tall buildings but also include ‘gaps’ that will likely be developed over time. Identifying the appropriate heights for new buildings around the Gore will be a critical task.

In order to retain the character of the area, new development shall meet the following design priorities:

a. Buildings shall retain the traditional building line; limited façade articulation may be permitted to allow for sheltered areas and patios at ground level.

b. New buildings shall align to the side lot line to avoid gaps in the street-wall.

c. New buildings shall be consistent with traditional street-wall height of three to six storeys.

d. Upper storeys may be allowed if sufficiently set back so that no additional shadows or wind impacts result from them.

e. Traditional materials of stone, wood, and brick shall be used; other materials may be allowed provided that they are visually harmonious with adjacent buildings.

f. The articulation of the façade of new buildings shall reflect or complement the traditional patterns of windows and openings in adjacent buildings.

g. All buildings shall incorporate ground level pedestrian access; access for loading shall occur at the rear.

h. The ground floor frontage shall be strongly connected to the street and designed to accommodate signage that will respect the architectural integrity of the building.

KEY FINDINGS

The existing zoning permits a wide range of heights within this Character Area. However, the Downtown Secondary Plan establishes conditions and constraints over the permitted heights in order to ensure that if maximum heights are pursued, the new development conforms with the City’s vision for the Gore.
Character Area Design Priorities

MAIN STREET CORRIDOR

The vision for the Main Street Corridor is to strengthen Main Street’s image as a primary residential and commercial avenue within the Downtown.

The Main Street Corridor is already home to a mix of tall buildings. The wider street widths and easy access creates development conditions suitable for accommodating a mix of mid-rise and tall buildings.

In order to retain the character of the area, new development shall meet the following design priorities:

a. Buildings shall contribute to the creation of public open space along the street through appropriately located amenity areas that contribute to the pedestrian environment on Main Street.

b. Generally, new development should be mid-rise in height in order to maintain a pedestrian scale along the street. Taller buildings may be permitted if massed in such a manner that additional height will not result in any adverse shadow or wind impacts on the public sidewalks.

c. Any development between James Street and Catharine Street shall enhance the character of several prominent sites including the John Sopinka Courthouse and Prince's Square:
   i. Corner sites adjacent to the Courthouse Square are to be built to the street line to frame and define this important public space; and shall address impacts on existing or proposed public transit stops.
   ii. The height of new buildings directly adjacent to or facing the Courthouse square shall not exceed the height of the existing John Sopinka Courthouse at the street level and shall minimize and sun, shadow or wind impacts on the Courthouse Square and adjoining Gore area.

KEY FINDINGS:

Main Street is not envisioned by the Secondary Plan to have a consistent height along its full length but rather by segments. Despite this, both sides of the street should be similar in height. Some taller buildings are permitted in certain locations, however, for the balance of the corridor, it is unlikely that any building taller than 12 storeys can be accommodated without casting significant shadows onto the public street (based on the limited average depth of properties).
Character Area Design Priorities

YORK BOULEVARD CORRIDOR

The vision for the York Boulevard Corridor is to create a strong streetwall that will emphasize the character of the corridor as a primary access to the Downtown.

As a gateway into the Downtown, the York Boulevard area could offer opportunities for redevelopment.

In order to retain the character of the area, new development shall meet the following design priorities:

a. All new buildings will be built to the street line. Additional setbacks may be permitted to accommodate amenities and additional open space.

b. Surface parking will not abut York Boulevard.

c. Street-oriented uses and at-grade retail will be accommodated at the ground floor, particularly along the north side of the street in order to maximize access to sunlight.

d. All new housing fronting onto local streets will be limited to low-density uses.

KEY FINDINGS:

While the Secondary Plan establishes maximum heights of 4 to 8 storeys, the size of some of the lots may provide an opportunity to fit taller buildings and should be supplemented with additional open space as well as be designed so that they create a gateway feature.
Character Area Design Priorities

JOHN STREET/REBECCA STREET

The vision for John Street / Rebecca Street is to feature street-oriented buildings that restore the traditional character of the Downtown area.

The parking lots around John and Rebecca Streets offer rare opportunities to develop full blocks of the Downtown. These blocks could house larger uses like community facilities or supermarkets that are integrated with a mix of building types including tall buildings, townhouses and mid-rise buildings.

In order to retain the character of the area, new development shall meet the following design priorities:

a. Surface parking will be located at the rear of buildings, with access through a consolidated driveway system.

b. The height of new buildings and additions should be low to mid-rise in order to maintain a pedestrian scale along the public streets. Certain higher-intensity and taller buildings may be permitted only if the height is massed to achieve a harmonious relationship with adjoining buildings, public spaces, and any planned development.

c. The façade of larger buildings will be designed with particular attention to detail and ensure that its articulation evoke the 8-20 m wide rhythm of the traditional downtown buildings.

d. Signage will be designed and located to be compatible with a residential environment.

KEY FINDINGS:

A new park, the John Rebecca Urban Park, will be developed at the core of this Character Area. The built form surrounding the park is to be mid-rise in order to maximize sunlight to this open space.
Character Area Design Priorities

**NEIGHBOURHOODS**

The vision for Neighbourhoods within the Downtown area is to support intensification while being consistent with the character of each area, whether low density, medium density or mixed-use development.

The balance of the Downtown Area not identified as one of the first six Character Areas is categorized as Neighbourhoods. While the Neighbourhoods Area may contain a mix of uses including retail and commercial uses, the predominant land use is residential.

In order to retain the character of the area, new development shall meet the following design priorities:

a. Intensification and infill projects will be consistent in design with the grid street pattern and architectural character of the adjacent area.

b. Retention and adaptive reuse of existing heritage and industrial buildings for residential use is a priority.

**KEY FINDINGS:**

Generally, the Secondary Plan allows for up to 4 storeys within the Neighbourhood Area. Nonetheless, tall buildings may be permitted, as long as the building meets the site selection criteria identified within the Tall Buildings Study and abides by the performance standards as outlined in the Guidelines.