



# UNLOCKING THE POTENTIAL FOR MID-RISE BUILDINGS

SIX STOREY WOOD STRUCTURES

Prepared for the Building Industry and Land Development Association

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February 2013

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- This report presents a strong planning rationale for changing the existing Ontario Building Code to permit wood frame buildings to be constructed to a maximum of six storeys in order to unlock the immense potential of a new mid-rise market throughout the Greater Toronto and Hamilton Area, the Greater Golden Horseshoe and in many other cities throughout the province.
- The incredible opportunity to realize this vision and to create safe, cost effective and liveable building forms is not being met. One of the reasons for this is that the existing Ontario Building Code requirement limits wood frame buildings to a maximum of four storeys. Changing this to a maximum of six storeys would increase the variety of living choices, realizes cost savings for construction of the home which is ultimately a benefit for the new home buyer, and represents a major step in achieving planned intensification goals of the Provincial Places to Grow Growth Plan and all GTHA regional and municipal Official Plans.
- Changing the Ontario Building Code along these lines would be similar to the changes that have already been implemented in 2009 to the British Columbia Building Code. Changes there had an immediate positive impact on the local economy. Expected impacts in Ontario would include job creation, increased availability of affordable housing, increased taxation and a minimization of the carbon footprint of building construction.
- The idea of building mid-rise residential and mixed-use buildings on urban corridors throughout the GTHA is a fundamental component of creating sustainable cities and regions. Lands along these urban corridors are generally underutilized. They represent a significant opportunity for re-development to accommodate future residential growth, are generally well-served by a variety of transit routes and make good use of the existing infrastructure.
- By recognizing the potential of mid-rise development, we have a choice to direct change in a positive way into urban corridors that are capable of accommodating various degrees of growth. The sites (which are often underutilized, vacant or include obsolescent properties) should receive special planning attention in terms of development incentives and precinct plans to guide future change. This planning strategy is a key way to protect the long term stability of low density residential neighbourhoods as it channels an opportunity to create a diversity of new housing, support the health of retail shops and boosts transit ridership. It is a win-win planning idea that needs to be seized throughout the region.

# Contents

INTRODUCTION .....	3
THE PLANNING VISION .....	3
Provincial Policy Context .....	3
Regional and Municipal Policy Context.....	4
DEVELOPMENT POTENTIAL.....	5
BARRIERS TO MID-RISE DEVELOPMENT .....	6
Ontario Building Code .....	6
Development Charges.....	6
Tax Policy Reform .....	7
Parkland Dedication Policies .....	7
PLANNING RATIONALE FOR MID-RISE .....	8
Corridors of Opportunity .....	8
Relationship to the Street and the Neighbourhood .....	8
Construction Cost Savings .....	10
Housing Diversity and Unit Type.....	10
Transit.....	11
Complete Streets .....	11
The Look and Feel of Buildings and the Street.....	11
Quality of Life .....	12
The Long Term Picture of City Building .....	12
CONCLUSIONS .....	13
RECOMMENDATIONS .....	13
REFERENCES .....	14

**“THE IDEA OF  
BUILDING MID-RISE  
RESIDENTIAL AND  
MIXED-USE  
BUILDINGS ON  
URBAN CORRIDORS  
THROUGHOUT THE  
GTHA IS A  
FUNDAMENTAL  
COMPONENT OF  
CREATING  
SUSTAINABLE CITIES  
AND REGIONS”**

## **INTRODUCTION**

This report presents a strong planning rationale for changing the existing Ontario Building Code to permit wood frame buildings to be constructed to a maximum of six storeys in order to unlock the immense potential of a new mid-rise market throughout the Greater Toronto and Hamilton Area (GTHA), the Greater Golden Horseshoe (GGH) and in many other cities throughout the province. This report was initiated by the Building Industry and Land Development Association (BILD).

The irony is that the incredible opportunity to realize this vision and to create safe, cost effective and livable building forms is not being met. One of the reasons for this is the existing Ontario Building Code requirement to limit wood frame buildings to a maximum of four storeys. Changing this limitation from four to a maximum of six storeys would increase the variety of living choices, realizes cost savings for construction of the home which is ultimately a benefit for the new home buyer, and represents a major step in achieving planned intensification goals of the Provincial Places to Grow Growth Plan and all GTHA regional and municipal Official Plans.

## **THE PLANNING VISION**

The idea of building mid-rise residential and mixed-use buildings on urban corridors throughout the GTHA is a fundamental component of creating sustainable cities and regions. Lands along these urban corridors are generally

underutilized and characterized by buildings of one to four storeys. They represent a significant opportunity for re-development to accommodate future residential growth, are generally well served by a variety of transit routes and make good use of the existing infrastructure.

This planning vision is not new. Building housing on main streets represents a long established tradition in the cities and towns of Ontario but the housing market has generally catered to either hi-rise or low rise construction. This has started to change with mid-rise development appearing in locations that can justify high construction and land costs. It is important to grow this market so that multiple benefits can be achieved.

Mid-rise buildings located along the urban corridors of our cities are a vital component of the vision of the Provincial Places to Grow Growth Plan and are found in virtually all regional and municipal Official Plans. All the right language is there but unless the economics of building mixed-use development on urban arterials throughout this region make sense, this policy vision will simply remain just a nice idea. Everything possible must be done to create a positive economic climate so that the private sector can respond in a creative and cost effective manner.

## **Provincial Policy Context**

The 2006 Provincial Places to Grow Growth Plan sets out a clear vision for the GGH which includes a wide variety of choices for living. The vision is grounded by six core principles that all focus on building complete communities to take advantage of existing infrastructure to support growth in a compact and efficient form. Compact urban form includes mid-rise apartments and apartments above retail uses that are typical of urban corridors.

The Plan also contains extensive policy statements that promote intensification in built up areas, reduce dependence on the automobile by building mixed-use transit-supportive, pedestrian-friendly development in intensification corridors in addition to a range and mix of housing, taking into account affordable housing needs. (1) The Plan requires that all regional and local Official Plans contain policies that conform to the Places to Grow Growth Plan. The Minister of Infrastructure must review the growth plan at least every 10 years.

after it comes into force and will review the forecasts at least every 5 years and may propose amendments.

In November, 2012, the Minister Proposed Amendment 2 to the Growth Plan to update the growth forecasts for population and employment and extend the time horizon of the forecasts and policies from 2031 to 2041. (2) These revised forecasts are based on a recent Ministry review of demographics, economic trends, land availability, infrastructure investment, water and waste water servicing capacity. The review projects a GGH population of 13.5 million and a GTHA population of 10.1 million by 2041. Consultation and feedback on Amendment 2 was concluded on February 8, 2013.

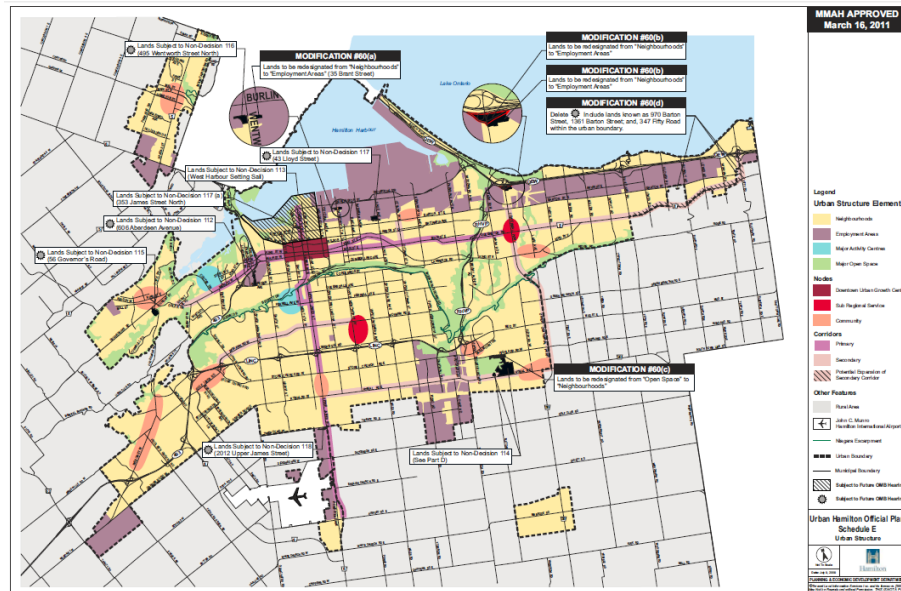


Figure 1. Official Plan Urban Structure Map - Hamilton

## Regional and Municipal Policy Context

A high level review of all GTHA Regional Official Plans and local Official Plans for major municipalities within the GTHA reveals a consistent set of policy statements designed to encourage various levels of mid-rise intensification on urban corridors. Examination of the Urban Structure Maps for the larger municipalities of Hamilton, Mississauga, Brampton, Toronto, Vaughan and Markham indicates extensive linear corridors are targeted for mixed-use development. Urban Structure Maps for Hamilton, Mississauga and Toronto are illustrated in figures 1, 2 and 3.

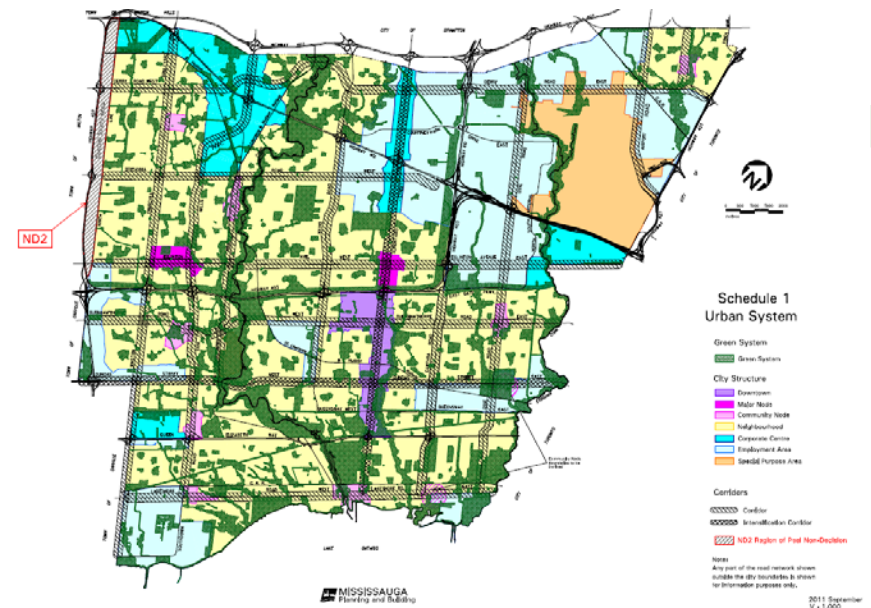


Figure 2. Official Plan Urban Structure Map - Mississauga



In the City of Toronto they are referred to as “Avenues” and comprise about 160 kilometres in total length. In Hamilton they are called “Primary and Secondary Corridors.” In Mississauga they are referred to as “Corridors and Intensification Corridors.” In Brampton they are labeled “Business Corridors.” In Markham they are referred to as “Intensification Areas”. Finally, in Vaughan they are called “Regional and Primary Intensification Corridors.” There are literally hundreds of kilometres of urban corridors throughout the GTHA that are now targeted for intensification.

All Official Plans contemplate achieving a wide variety of housing goals on lands within these linear corridors that run through our region and every municipality. Depending on the context, the scale of development contemplated varies from three to ten + storeys but the vast majority would fall into the four to six storey range. What is essential to understand is that one size does not fit all. However, if the province and its’ municipalities are serious about realizing the development potential of these corridors, steps need to be taken by all parties to make it easier and more affordable to build mid-rise construction.

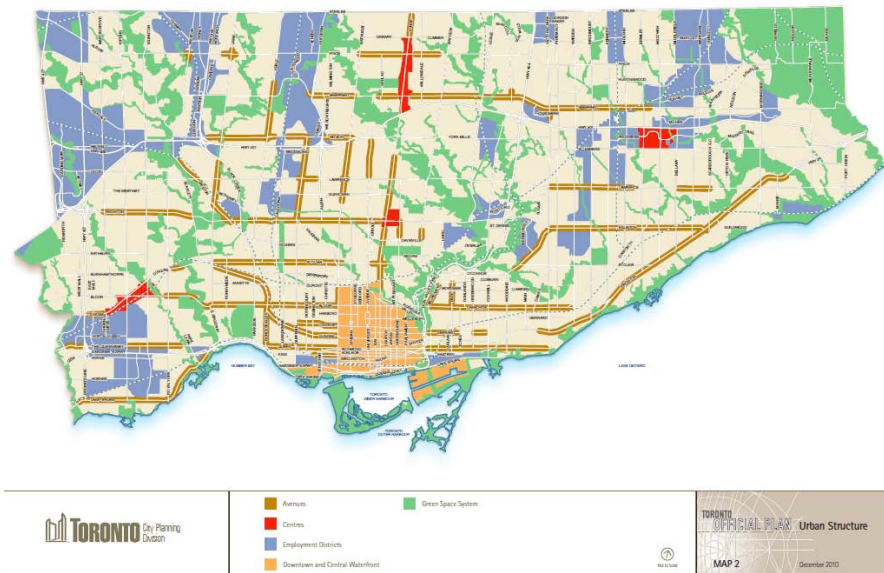


Figure 3. Official Plan Urban Structure Map - Toronto

## DEVELOPMENT POTENTIAL

It is sometimes hard to grasp the magnitude of housing that could be created if these barriers were removed. To help illustrate this potential, it is useful to reflect on the findings of a City of Toronto background study for the 2002 Official Plan called “Flashforward: Projecting Population and Employment to 2031 in a Mature Urban Area, June 2002”(3). This type of study is often referred to as the realistic development potential or a soft sites analysis.

The approach is very simple. An estimate of the residential capacity of all lands designated as “Avenues” that were zoned for mixed commercial-residential uses was developed using criteria to select prime re-development lands. The criteria meant that sites had to have a frontage of 22metres (75 feet), a site area of 100 square metres or more, the land was vacant or had two or less storeys, had no townhouse, walkup or medium rise apartment building and had no active development application filed. In total, there were 15,775 parcels of land fronting on the 160 kilometres of “Avenues”. Only about 1/10<sup>th</sup> of all sites or 1,443 parcels met these criteria.

The realistic residential development capacity was determined by assuming a maximum of six storeys (5 residential floors and 1 storey of ground floor retail use). Assumptions for the building footprint of 75% of the lot area and an average unit size of 92 square metres (1,000 square feet) were used to calculate the total. The end result generated a realistic development potential of 123,911 units of new housing.

The current 5 year review of Toronto’s Official Plan is most relevant to this discussion. Since 2006 when the Official Plan came into legal effect, 246 projects representing almost 30,000 residential units have been proposed for development on the “Avenues”. The majority of this is classified as mid-rise ranging from four to eleven storeys. This constitutes 28% of the 106,848 units proposed City-wide. (4)

This is a flexible model that could be easily applied to all intensification corridors throughout the GTHA in order to get an appreciation of the magnitude of the mid-rise market. It is not within the scope of this report to undertake such a study but given the hundreds of kilometres of corridor lands

designated for residential and mixed-use intensification throughout the GTHA, it would seem reasonable that the regional potential for a new mid-rise housing market could approach several hundred thousand units. This would go a long way in meeting the policy goals of provincial, regional and local Official Plans and would make a huge improvement to the achievement of complete streets throughout the region.

## BARRIERS TO MID-RISE DEVELOPMENT

“THERE ARE  
FUNDAMENTAL  
BARRIERS THAT  
REMAIN IN PLACE THAT  
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FRUSTRATE THE  
PLANNING GOALS OF  
CORRIDOR  
INTENSIFICATION”

### Ontario Building Code

Notwithstanding the best of intentions, there are fundamental barriers that remain in place that will continue to frustrate the planning goals of corridor intensification.

The existing Ontario Building Code (OBC), which limits stick or wood construction to a maximum of four storeys, is a major barrier. Allowing wood frame construction up to a maximum of six storeys has been

subject to longstanding concerns by fire chiefs and fire fighters over increased safety risks. These concerns are well documented in the August 2012 study titled “Evaluating Stakeholder Concerns with Wood Frame Buildings and Fire Risk” undertaken by Surrey, B.C Fire Chief Len Garis and Dr. Joseph Clare, strategic planning analyst for the Surrey Fire Service. (5) This study was undertaken to answer issues associated with Private Members’ Bill 52, Ontario Forestry Industry Revitalization Act (Height of Wood Frame Buildings), 2012.

The study concludes that changes to the Ontario Building Code would be possible to increase the maximum building height for wood frame buildings to

six storeys. This recommendation is subject to the adoption of fire safety strategies that in order to ensure that six storey wood frame buildings would perform as least as well as buildings currently permitted under the existing OBC.

Changing the OBC along these lines would be similar to the changes that have already been implemented in 2009 to the British Columbia Building Code (BCBC). It was noted that the B.C. Fire Chiefs’ Association expressed similar reservations as the Ontario Fire Chiefs’ Association but that these initial concerns were withdrawn once a due process was followed in B.C. The study further noted that the changes to the BCBC had an immediate positive impact on the local economy. Expected impacts in Ontario would include job creation, increased availability of affordable housing, increased taxation and a minimization of the carbon footprint of building construction.

From a planning perspective, adopting changes to the OBC to permit wood frame construction for four to six storey buildings would represent substantial construction cost savings over poured concrete structures which would translate into a more affordable unit to the home buyer. More importantly, allowing wood frame buildings up to a maximum of six storeys would likely kick-start the mid-rise housing market at a time when the market is dominated by either hi-rise or low rise building. This is especially true in the suburbs that do not share the locational advantages of inner city development sites.

### Development Charges

All municipalities within the GTHA have a schedule of development charges but the amounts vary considerably. The general philosophy underpinning development charges is that growth should pay for growth. This approach makes sense in situations where infrastructure does not exist or needs to be substantially upgraded to accommodate intensification. For example, within the “Urban Area” of the Region of Halton, the development charge for apartment units ranges from \$24,409 to \$29,586. In contrast, the development charge for apartment units located within the Greenfield area of Halton Region ranges from \$28,957 to \$34,134.(6)

However, in mature urban areas the infrastructure is already in place and in many cases is underutilized. In the City of Toronto, the 2012 development charge for a bachelor or one bedroom unit is \$7,164 and \$ 10,841 for a two bedroom or larger unit. (7) In recognition of the benefits of development intensification experienced to date, the City of Waterloo is currently proposing a reduction of approximately 20% in development charges for apartment units from \$6,612 to \$5,343 for bachelor and one bedroom units and from \$8,598 to \$6,947 for two and three bedroom units. (8)

Within the City of Toronto, additional inconsistencies exist as the same development charge applies to new units anywhere in the City regardless of its location. As a result, a developer has to pay the same development charge for a unit built in Yorkville and a unit built in a priority neighbourhood such as Jane and Finch. This makes no sense and only serves to put less attractive areas at a further disadvantage as these areas are exactly where new private sector investment is critically needed.

If the potential of mid-rise development is to be realized, it would make total sense to reduce or totally exempt key urban corridors from paying development charges. This would act as an incentive to attract developers to invest in new construction. A detailed study of such options should be undertaken by the Building and Land Development Industry.

### **Tax Policy Reform**

Adoption of favourable tax policy reform would also have a positive effect on kick-starting mid-rise construction. Municipalities could offer property tax exemptions for a given period of time in order to attract new development along urban corridors.

Additionally, the Federal government could bring back large scale, private sector rental housing construction by permitting developers to write off capital costs from income taxes known as the Capital Cost Allowance. This type of tax policy was responsible for the creation of massive amounts of private sector

rental housing construction in the 1960's and 1970's that still dominates many neighbourhoods throughout the GTHA. Indirect incentives for rental housing supported this building boom. Private capital flowed to rental housing because it was a good investment relative to others. When the condominium market developed, the Federal government withdrew its supportive tax environment and private rental housing slowed to a halt.

The combination of allowing wood frame construction up to six storeys in addition to a positive tax environment would enable the private sector to build a new supply of badly needed rental units along urban corridors that could meet the diverse housing needs of the existing and future population.

**“ADOPTION OF FAVORABLE TAX POLICY REFORM  
WOULD ALSO HAVE A POSITIVE EFFECT ON KICK-  
STARTING MID-RISE CONSTRUCTION”**

### **Parkland Dedication Policies**

The Ontario Planning Act says “that a municipality may utilize an alternate parkland dedication rate of one hectare per 300 units”. Many area municipalities tend to utilize this provision in order to create new parkland to service growth associated more with a greenfield environment. However, in the City of Toronto, a lower parkland dedication rate of 0.4 hectares per 300 dwelling units is in force. This reflects the reality of a mature built city.

On urban corridors, what is often most important to encourage mixed-use re-urbanization is the provision of high quality pedestrian amenities, wider sidewalks and streetscape improvements. To help stimulate a positive investment climate for mid-rise construction it would seem to make more sense for municipalities to develop strategies that would improve the quality of the public realm within urban corridors and consider adopting a much lower alternate parkland dedication policy than is provided for in the Planning Act. BILD should consider initiating a further study of this matter.

## PLANNING RATIONALE FOR MID-RISE

### Corridors of Opportunity

Within the GTHA there are hundreds of kilometres of arterial roads that have been designated in regional and municipal Official Plans for intensification. Corridors that are characterized by one storey buildings, car dominated uses, vacant and underutilized lands with large areas of surface parking are prime opportunities and priorities for intensification. Each corridor is different in terms of lots sizes, configuration, street width, existing uses, neighbourhousing uses, transit service and streetscape potential. Change will occur incrementally over time and respond to the context of each corridor. This process will involve local residents, businesses, business improvement areas (BIA's) and other stakeholders.

In mature urban areas, the framework for new development will be established through area planning studies that will determine new zoning rules spelling out uses, heights, densities, setbacks and other matters. In suburban areas, there is an opportunity to establish a totally new zoning framework for mid-rise development that can implement the policies of the Official Plan. In all cases, mid-rise is a transformational opportunity to achieve high quality development that significantly increases the range of housing choices for people of all ages.

### Relationship to the Street and the Neighbourhood

There are important advantages of providing an appropriate scale, type, range and mix of housing in Ontario that can be achieved through mid-rise development. Most main streets form the heart of many neighbourhoods and are often bordered by stable low density communities that predominantly consist of two to three storey single family houses. These communities are sensitive to change and generally are not supportive of buildings that exceed a comfortable height and scale so the relationship to new mid-rise development is of great interest.

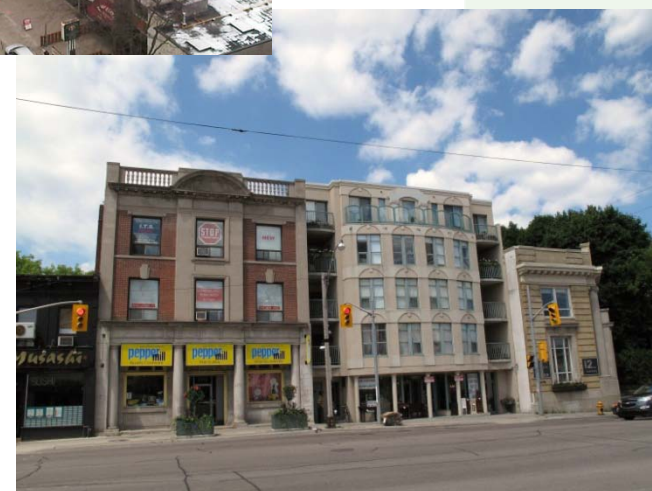
While most people do not welcome change it is essential to understand that our cities and region will continue to change regardless. We have a choice to

direct change in a positive way into urban corridors that are capable of accommodating various degrees of growth. This planning strategy is a key way to protect the long term stability of low density residential neighbourhoods as it channels an opportunity to create a diversity of new housing, support the health of retail shops and boosts transit ridership. It is a win-win planning idea that needs to be seized throughout the region.



Figure 4. Buildings within a 4 to 6 storey height range at Yonge & Aylmer (Left Photo)

Figure 5.  
Yonge and CPR Tracks  
(Right Photo)





Buildings within the four to six storey height range seem to represent the sweet spot of main street development that offers a moderate degree of intensification that most people are comfortable with, as seen in Figures 4 through 8. This scale of building often represents an attractive housing alternative for long established neighbourhood residents who are downsizing from larger homes, seeking a carefree condo lifestyle and who want to stay in the same neighbourhood.



Figure 6. Yonge and Broadway



Figure 7. 109 Ossington

Ironically, it is the local residents who often oppose new mid-rise buildings in the four to six storey range (as is currently the case in the Beach and Lower Ossington.) Notwithstanding this reality, the majority of buyers for new mid-rise building actually come from the immediate neighbourhood. This is the case with both the Beach and Lower Ossington buildings and is the norm for most new mid-rise buildings.

Mid-rise buildings of four to six storeys seem to represent a scale that is compatible with most established neighbourhoods especially when the upper two floors are setback so the visual impact on the street is less noticeable. Six storey buildings can be built within a height limit of 20 metres, which is comparable to the 20 metre width of most urban streets in the older parts of Toronto. As a general rule, the height of buildings on urban corridors should be roughly equal to the street right-of-way width.



Figure 8. College & Dovercourt

## Construction Cost Savings

**“ON A 1,000 SQUARE FOOT UNIT, A COST SAVINGS OF \$20-25,000 COULD THEREFORE BE ACHIEVED. THIS IS A SUBSTANTIAL OPPORTUNITY THAT SHOULD NOT BE IGNORED.”**

The ability to utilize wood frame instead of poured frame construction for buildings up to six storeys on the urban corridors throughout the GTHA would produce definite cost savings for both the builder and the end user. It is hard to generalize in such a large region but a preliminary investigation of construction costs with well respected

builders operating in our region indicates that cost savings for utilizing wood frame could be in the order of \$30-40 per square foot or approximately 15-20% of construction costs. The price can vary according to the parking arrangements, exterior wall treatment, fireproofing and possibly earthquake structural requirements which would probably translate into a \$20-25 per square foot savings or approximately 10-15% less than concrete construction. On a 1,000 square foot unit, a cost savings of \$20-25,000 could therefore be achieved. This is a substantial opportunity that should not be ignored. (9)

These figures represent the actual experiences of long established developers in Toronto and clearly are only a sample. However, they do illustrate that wood frame construction would enable developers to produce projects at a more cost effective rate and would likely enable a larger number of smaller developers to enter the mid-rise market. This is especially important for smaller projects in the 905 area where the development charges are much higher than those in the City of Toronto.

Given the construction cost savings realized with wood frame, these substantial savings would be passed through the system resulting in a more affordable condo or rental unit brought to the market. The creation of more affordable ownership and or rental housing by the private sector is an obvious benefit to governments who do not have to provide financial subsidies. It is a

definite benefit for people in need of housing and is a benefit to the construction and development industry.

## Housing Diversity and Unit Type

Within this scale, it is possible to build a variety of unit types including larger units with decks or terraces. The lack of larger units that can accommodate families in hi-rise condos is a key issue to be addressed. Mid-rise development on main streets can help to meet this demand by offering a variety of configurations and unit sizes including through units with frontage on both the main street and the rear facing adjacent neighbourhoods. Attractive development opportunities for main streets buildings are often found on corner lots that have sufficient depth and rear lane access which enables maximum design flexibility. Terraced upper floors also create new possibilities.

Quality design must be a cornerstone of every urban corridor as these streets are the faces of our cities and region. The tremendous diversity of parcel sizes and shapes allows architects to experiment with different building types and forms to achieve housing choices for all age groups. Changing the Ontario Building Code to allow wood frame construction up to six storeys would represent a new type of building that could spark design innovation. The Province and cities could promote this opportunity through design competitions to celebrate the best examples of development.

Mid-rise development also offers tremendous potential to accommodate seniors in a variety of housing types. These can be public and or private accommodation including retirement and nursing homes that offer a range of care. Contrary to popular belief, most seniors enjoy being surrounded by normal daily life with people of all ages. Main streets and urban corridors are excellent locations for such housing with shopping, transit and a range of community support facilities often found on the street. These include medical facilities that can often be reached by walking or by a short transit ride. Most people want to retain all the important contacts they have established throughout their life which include a face to face relationship with local merchants, many of whom make local deliveries.

## Transit

The growth and redevelopment of urban corridors needs to be supported by high quality transit service. In the City of Toronto, almost all of the main streets have bus service with more densely populated corridors served by streetcars or subways. As development intensifies over time it is essential to ensure frequent and reliable transit service, along with the adoption of priority measures, is provided to meet the needs of increased population.

High quality and dependable surface transit is of critical importance to the success of mid-rise development. It provides residents with travel choices and reduces the dependency on the car as the only means of transportation. As new Light Rapid Transit (LRT) lines are built along Eglinton, Sheppard, Finch, Scarborough, Highway 7, Hurontario and throughout the GTHA over the coming decade, they will help to spur mid-rise growth. On November 29, 2012, Metrolinx announced a commitment to additional subway and surface transit lines throughout the region over the coming 15 years. Development of these lines will change the image and function of corridors from only arteries of movement to arteries of development opportunity.

## Complete Streets

The planning goal of building complete streets can also be substantially advanced by the development of mid-rise construction. The key ingredient in realizing a complete street and the provincial and municipal planning goals is more density. This message can be hard for many people to understand as they usually have a negative image of density. Yet without the addition of more people, most urban streets will not be capable of transformation and rejuvenation.

Mid-rise development can also be a means to improving the streetscape and quality of the pedestrian environment, where trees can be planted and where the road allowance can be utilized for community benefits to create new or improved public space. Urban corridors should become meeting places for local residents and the wider community with focal points and attractive, bustling sidewalk life. Increased population gradually enhances local businesses and creates a demand for new business opportunities. These changes can

benefit both established and new residents as funding opportunities present themselves and development proceeds over time.

Complete streets thrive on mixed-use with vibrant retail uses at grade and residential uses above. The increased residential population represents new customers for the local merchants, adds pedestrian life to the street and adds richness to the neighbourhood. Advancing mid-rise construction represents one of the best planning strategies available to transform the complete streets vision into reality but it needs more than nice policy statements to achieve it.

**“COMPLETE  
STREETS THRIVE  
ON MIXED-USE  
WITH VIBRANT  
RETAIL USES AT  
GRADE AND  
RESIDENTIAL USES  
ABOVE”**

## The Look and Feel of Buildings and the Street

The look and feel of the street is also integral to attracting mid-rise development. Where the streets are the most successful, they tend to have wide sidewalks, pedestrian amenities and are a pleasant environment to shop, stroll or enjoy the experience of a sidewalk café. Other streets are inhospitable to pedestrians with wide and busy high speed traffic, narrow sidewalks and surface parking that isolate buildings from the sidewalk. Cities can play a major role in developing urban design guidelines and performance based zoning to stimulate positive change in order to re-image the look and feel of these streets.

The analogy of urban acupuncture can also be a very powerful tool to change the appeal of a street for new mid-rise development. Perhaps the best example of this was in the City of Toronto when the City Council decided to convert the public parking lot behind the flat iron Gooderham and Worts office building at Front Street and Wellington Street East into a public park (Berczy Park) in the 1970's. This demonstration of political will stimulated private sector investment in buildings on both streets and created a whole new vibrant district. Every city is capable of creating new parks or public squares on city-owned lands in a similar fashion.

## “QUALITY OF LIFE IS THE LINCHPIN TO A VIRTUOUS CYCLE OF GROWTH AND RENEWAL”

### Quality of Life

Quality of life is a relative term and the single most important matter to address for our region. It is the key to enjoyment and leads to improved economic competitiveness and rising prosperity. Quality of life is the linchpin to a virtuous cycle of growth and renewal.

The Provincial Places to Grow Growth Plan is a great vision for the future. But a great vision alone can't create a great region. It is essential to bring the vision to life through a clear implementation strategy. Mid-rise development on our urban corridors is a transformative component of this vision.

It offers endless possibilities to improve the quality of life for existing and future residents through a diversity of housing choice. It offers region wide opportunities to improve the level of transit. It offers opportunities to reinforce the health of retail shopping districts. Mid-rise development creates the potential of a new market that is capable of housing hundreds of thousands of people in the coming decades. Above all, it makes a huge contribution to raising the quality of life throughout our region by improving the daily living, working and transportation life cycle choices of existing residents.

### The Long Term Picture of City Building

The Proposed Amendment 2 by the Minister of Infrastructure to update and revise population and employment projections for the GGH to 2041 emphasizes the importance of taking the long view and looking at the big picture. While 2041 may seem like a long time from now, it is just under 30 years.

Looking back 30 years to 1983 may help to reflect on the degree of change that will take place. Since that time, the GTHA has grown substantially with much of that growth taking place in a car dependent pattern that is problematic and will only get worse unless a major investment in transit is made to support a regional population in excess of 10 million.

This means that the GTHA will add 3.5 million people to our region. This is equivalent to Greater Montreal or the equivalent of adding the cities of Vancouver, Calgary, Edmonton and Ottawa. It represents a unique window of opportunity to build great streets of the future that provide a sustainable model that will stand the test of time. Mid-rise development is a major component of this opportunity.

We now have the Provincial Growth Plan in place in addition to the Metrolinx Big Move Transit Plan. Together, these documents have the potential to shape the region in a sustainable way if the political will exists to stay the course and find new funding sources to support growth. Mid-rise wood frame construction up to six storeys on urban corridors would represent a fundamental breakthrough in advancing the transformation of our main streets. This simple change to the Ontario Building Code would bring a substantial range of benefits to both the public and private sector and could be achieved through a relatively quick process. It is a cost effective strategy that should be initiated without hesitation.



## CONCLUSIONS

In order to create a sustainable city region over time it is essential to fully embrace a paradigm shift to bring the Places to Grow policies to life in a shorter time frame. This paradigm shift is all about moving minds.

This process has been underway since 2006 with the adoption of the Places to Grow Growth Plan. Every year approximately 100,000 people move into the region. When out migration is factored in there is still an annual demand for approximately 35 to 40,000 new housing units per year in the region. This is a huge challenge that can only be met if everyone involved in the building and land industry are moving in the same direction. This includes engaging all three levels of government, the private sector, land owners, developers and communities.

The Province has taken important steps to encourage future development in built up areas instead of allowing continuous sprawl outward. Advancing the case for mid-rise could be achieved by understanding the realistic development potential of all designated urban corridors. Natural systems and transportation networks need to be integrated into the thinking and a soft sites analysis undertaken to identify key parcels of land that are ripe for redevelopment. These sites could include obsolescent properties, vacant lands, underutilized sites and sites with one storey buildings that are easy to redevelop. The sites should receive special planning attention in terms of development incentives and precinct plans to guide future change. They have the potential to provide housing for the full range of incomes, can advance the development of complete streets and can help to expedite transit improvements.

Investments in community improvements by public agencies through capital budgets must be made to support high quality urban living. The public sector also has an obligation to create a positive environment to encourage private sector investment through a combination of creative zoning, innovative tax policy and supportive infrastructure. Unleashing the untapped potential of urban corridors is an extraordinary opportunity to build the next generation of buildings and create the great urban streets of the future!

## RECOMMENDATIONS

1. That this report be forwarded to the Board of the Building and Land Development Industry (BILD) for its consideration and other relevant stakeholders.
2. That BILD undertake the appropriate background studies associated with exempting development charges, lower alternative parkland dedication policies and favourable tax policies at the local and Federal levels to help stimulate a positive investment environment for mid-rise housing located on urban corridors
3. That BILD communicate to the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing its strong support to change the Ontario Building Code to increase the maximum building height for wood frame buildings in Ontario to six storeys.

## REFERENCES

- (1) Ministry of Public Infrastructure Renewal, "Places to Grow Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe", 2006
- (2) Ministry of Infrastructure, "Proposed Amendment 2 to the Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe, 2006", November 2012
- (3) City of Toronto, Urban Development Services, "Toronto Plan Flashforward: Projecting Population and Employment to 2031 in a Mature Urban Area", June 2002
- (4) City of Toronto, City Plan Division, "Profile Toronto: How Does the City Grow"? June 2011
- (5) Garis, Len and Clare, Dr. Joseph, "Evaluating Stakeholder Concerns with Wood Frame Buildings and Fire Risk", University of the Fraser Valley, August 2012
- (6) Town of Oakville Development Charge Brochure, "Development Charges for the Town of Oakville, The Region of Halton and the Halton District School Boards", September 5, 2012
- (7) City of Toronto, By-law No. 1228-2011, "Development Charges Rates as of February 1, 2012"
- (8) Paige, Desmond, Waterloo Record, "Waterloo proposes to drop residential development charges", November 29, 2012
- (9) Consultation with Murray Goldman, Chairman, The Goldman Group and Emilio Tesolin, Monarch Group, November 30, 2012