

March 29, 2000

**To: Joanne Flint; Chair  
Members of the Planning and Transportation  
Committee**

**From: Councillor Michael Walker**

**Subject: Official Plan Submission #2 –  
Stable Neighbourhoods Policy**

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**Recommendations:**

1. That staff from the Urban Planning and Development Department be requested to report on the attached submission; and,
2. That this report outline a suggested consultation process including constituencies to consult and timeframes to report back for final inclusion in the new Official Plan.

**Overview:**

***In Defence of Neighbourhoods***

Toronto is a city of neighbourhoods. More than anything else, neighbourhoods make our City special. Our neighbourhoods make up unique and distinct communities, each one with its own particular history and flavour; its own distinct blend of urban forms and styles; its own mix of apartment buildings, homes, offices, retail strips, and so on.

Toronto's neighbourhoods are as diverse as the people who live here. From the spectacular views and summertime bustle of the Harbourfront condominium community to the peaceful tree lined streets of Forest Hill. From the restaurants, rowhouses and old-world charm of Cabbagetown to the open quiet roads of the Scarborough Bluffs to the unique urban environment of Thorncrest Village in Etobicoke; diversity is truly Toronto's strength.

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The quality of life that we enjoy here in Toronto has come about in large part due to the vigilance of ordinary citizens in addition to some visionary planners and politicians who had fundamental beliefs in the strength of local democracy. That strength is visible in the quality of life we enjoy in each one of our communities. While successful neighbourhoods may appear different from one to the next, all share one common trait – that is the local residents' determination to keep their communities stable, successful, vibrant places to live, work and play.

### ***Our Neighbourhoods: In Need of Protection***

Successful residential neighbourhoods, particularly in the old City of Toronto, are increasingly under threat. Persistent development pressures are threatening to destroy what we have built with over-development, loss of open space, traffic and parking congestion.

Excessive coverage of monster houses, loop holes permitting more density than allowed, destruction of trees on the City boulevard and asphaltting of front yards are trends that are becoming increasingly common in our residential communities. The end result will be an overall erosion to the beauty and fabric of our neighbourhoods. It needs to be stopped now.

The creation of a new Official Plan requires that the City of Toronto review and revise its policy on neighbourhoods. It also provides an opportunity to do something visionary - an opportunity to formally protect the neighbourhoods that have made this city so successful. A *'Stable Neighbourhoods Policy'* which provides residents with the tools to effectively shape, maintain and defend their neighbourhoods and the characteristics they value most about life in their community.

**Toronto's new Official Plan must include a  
'preservation of stable neighbourhoods' policy**

## **Framework**

### ***A Stable Neighbourhoods Policy for the City of Toronto***

A 'Stable Neighbourhoods Policy' should include the following three components:

- 1. Identify specifically each individual neighbourhood across the City of Toronto and enshrine them in the new Official Plan.**
- 2. Establish a special planning regimen for areas zoned low-density residential.**
- 3. Develop and entrench Neighbourhood Stability Plans (NSP's) for each of the neighbourhood areas identified as noted above.**

## **Part 1**

### ***Identify each neighbourhood in the City of Toronto and enshrine them in the new Official Plan.***

The new Official Plan is supposed to protect "stable residential neighbourhoods" by viewing them through its "first lens". But any kind of detail on what exactly defines a stable neighbourhood and what, if any additional protections will be afforded by the new Official Plan have not been forthcoming. What is a "stable neighbourhood" and more importantly – where exactly are the stable residential neighbourhoods?

The first step in this process must be to identify the neighbourhoods themselves. This would likely be a lengthy exercise involving city staff, Councillors, residents and ratepayers associations, local business, community agencies and other stakeholders.

It is important that the Official Plan specifically identify each individual residential neighbourhood and that the following be included in each neighbourhood description:

- Neighbourhood Name
- Neighbourhood Boundaries
- Neighbourhood Profile
- Built Form/Architectural Style
- Scale and rate of development
- Active Ratepayer and/or Community Organizations

## **Part 2**

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***Establish a special planning regimen for areas zoned low-density residential.***

This must include the following :

- A special exemption for stable residential neighbourhoods from the blanket policy of intensification suggested in initial discussions regarding the City of Toronto Vision Plan.
- Proscribed guidelines for new development and renewal on residential streets.
- Proscribed limits on : (i) In-fill and re-development on residential streets (ii) Heights & densities in residential neighbourhoods. These are the only tools residents have to fight unreasonable, intrusive development at the Committee of Adjustment. Limits must be effective and consistent in their application.
- Elimination of legal non-conforming uses in any redevelopment of a property with site-specific Official Plan or Zoning By-law amendment.
- Dedicated community planners that:
  - (i) have intimate knowledge of the local neighbourhoods
  - (ii) review development applications within the context of the existing character and scale of development in the neighbourhood.
  - (iii) provide ongoing advice and opinion to members of the Committee of Adjustment.

### **Part 3**

#### ***Develop and entrench Neighbourhood Stability Plans (NSP's) for each of the neighbourhood areas identified as noted above.***

Planning staff in consultation with the Official Plan Reference group would formulate a set of principles and a process to guide community residents in identifying, assessing and defining, within zones of tolerance, the key components and unique characteristics of their neighbourhoods.

Results of the community consultations and neighbourhood assessment/profile would help set out long-term goals for the community in terms of change and renewal. These goals would provide the basis for each Neighbourhood Stability Plan, which would codify local planning goals and provide special by-laws to make sure those goals are accomplished.

Each Neighbourhoods Stability Plan (NSP) would be in large part designed by the local community, in a process facilitated by local ratepayers/community associations; City Councillors and Planning staff. At the end of the process, each NSP for each neighbourhood could be approved through an open community vote at local "town hall meetings".

### **Conclusion**

Amalgamation; the downsizing of municipal government; and a new Official Plan are pushing this city in a new direction. As we set about to shape Toronto's future, we must first look to the present and then to our past. We must identify those things that currently exist in our City which make it unique; the things we value; the things that have made this city a success story for decades.

Of all Toronto's successes, we take the greatest pride in our neighbourhoods and communities. They are the most important institutions in this City. They do not need to be intensified; they do not need to be tinkered with; what they do need is protection to keep them the way they are now.

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Appropriate development in a residential neighbourhood is development of the same form, scale and character as what is existing. New investment should be sensitive to expectations are eroded by over-development in their community, the quality of life in the neighbourhood suffers.

At the end of the day, residents of residential neighbourhoods have the most vested interest in ensuring the long-term viability and success of their own communities. We need to re-enfranchise our citizens and re-invest in the collective wisdom of our neighbourhoods.

**Michael Walker – March 29, 2000**

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Michael Walker". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with large, connected letters.