

## A Jane Jacobs Report Card on the West Queen West Triangle

### **Avoid Super-blocks**

### **Overall Grade - F**

Yes, we started with a large block of mostly abandoned industrial land without much by the way of road right-of-way so we were well on the way to a super block of all new construction at the starting gate. But the result is still inexcusable.

One grand old and still useful building, 48 Abell, that would have given the new neighborhood character and variety was sacrificed. "Cities need old buildings so badly it is probably impossible for vigorous streets and districts to grow without them."

*Death and Life*, Ch. 10. **F to the developer** for that awful mistake.

The Planners got a new road on the south perimeter, the extension of Sudbury Street, and an extension of Abell Street. These were obvious and easy (except the cost). But the planners gave away the Northcote Extension which should be a proper street running down Sudbury. Yes, part of it is public access open space but most is minor bike path and pedestrian way. Far worse, unforgivable, was allowing the developer to build over the street space at Queen instead of being an open-to-sky junction at Queen St. and accepted a tunnel entrance to that public access open space that should be a full street! This was a completely unnecessary give away. The E-W penetration mid-block degenerated from a promising pedestrian mews into what will be a long canyon, doomed to be unsafe at night. The network of internal walkways, supposedly public access open space is a poor substitute for a street. Let's see how long these stay unlocked after the condo corps take over.

The best that can be said is that the planners started with a pattern of odd lots and individual owners and no plan and had a difficult job, But they should have a better plan in place before the development storm broke.

**The planners get an F for the horrible mistake of agreeing to the Northcote tunnel.**

The politician was caught napping. He should have seen this mess coming and protected the neighborhood. **D**

### **Intensification**

### **Overall Grade C-**

Intensification is not just necessary but also good (provided there is variety, variety, variety! But there are no points given for advocating intensification on this largely abandoned industrial site. It's a no brainer. But intensification which creates a super-block without sufficient street penetration, with minimal parkland and which destroys vibrant streets such as Queen West - is very poor. This is how you build a slum.

## Variety of Uses

## Overall Grade B

Planners fought hard at the OMB, and lost, to preserve mixed use designation and mostly continued that effort in the post Hearing negotiations and maneuvers. All developers fought hard on every other aspect of mixed use and any mandatory non-residential uses. This code for work space. Very bad.

If the City holds firm on the requirement for non-residential uses for the balance of the Triangle we may yet achieve some more interesting non-residential uses.

Two developers were open to including artists in their buildings as residents, in live work studios, and one was generous in making a deal along these lines, albeit at the last possible moment. Proportionally there will be fewer artists than before. (Some would say that is a good thing!) And they will be mostly different artists than the current residents.

**City planners get A for their effort.** (They need to gear up to fight this fight over and over again – and not just for artists.)

The **City lawyer** at the OMB also gets **A** for her effort on this matter.

The Mayor and the whole City Council (except those who voted against) get **A** for agreeing to take on a difficult appeal on this point.

Whatever **City staff** advised abandoning the appeal on this point gets **F-**.

The local councilor gets **F** for taking that advice and moving the motion in Council to take a crummy settlement the day before the argument.

The **Developers** get **C+**.

**The O.M.B. gets F - - -** for missing the boat on this critical and obvious point.

The **Ontario Court of Justice** gets an **A** for the Reasons granting Leave because the OMB ignored the employment policies of the Province.

## Busy Sidewalks Full of Life

## Overall Grade C

Busy sidewalks full of life are the heart and soul of the Jane Jacobs message. Save them where they exist. Design for them where they don't.

The massive 1171 building on the south of Queen breaks the 3 story norm of Queen from University to Shaw which continues to the west through Parkdale. The excuse given – 8 story intensification along main streets – is awful.

The original plan to restrict the size of the stores – as strongly recommended by the community charrette - fell by the wayside as planners testified for wider store widths. In the very last stages of negotiating the final wording of the Bylaw the Planning Department rolled over completely on this for Baywood's Building east of the tunnel. Chain store retailing is coming when it could have been resisted.

The building face on Queen St. barely distinguishes individual units at street level.

It would so easy to design for a more individualized appearance.

Still there will be stores on the south side where none exist and now a functioning theatre added to the mix.

**The Developer's architect gets a D.**

**City planners get a D.**

## Variety of Buildings

## Overall Grade D

The old warehouse building at 48 Abell goes to the wrecker. This was the building that could have given character. It is a re-useable building. Here is a key failing of the new plan. **F to the owner / developer.**

In defense of the planners on this point we can say they had few powers to protect such buildings. This failure was not that of the planners on the spot. It is a failure of the big cheese politicians and planners higher up who have to taken action to save old buildings. **D to provincial politicians.**

The effort in WQW by the local councilor to save 48 Abell as a 'heritage building' was too little too late and barely plausible under the existing legislation. **B for effort**

The design of the 150 Sudbury Building is interesting. **B+ to those architects and developer.**

The monolithic façade of the Queen St project is a disaster for Queen St. the neighborhood. **F to that architect.**

The planners could have fought harder for an articulated façade on Queen St. to moderate that effect though for the most part the design of buildings is beyond their planning power. **Planners get a C.**

## Area Design

## Overall Grade D

The City planners fought hard at the OMB for sensible scale and massing still allowing for significant intensification. The developers were in a competition to get the greatest density. There was almost no consideration by them to the overall effect of their adjoining lands.

City planners tended to pure design as the guiding principles in looking at massing. Jane says 'form follows function ... hurray for a jumble if the jumble makes the streets hum.' But in the end they bent and compromised enough to get the large artist studio space, enough though it wasn't the best from a architectural / massing point of view.

**City Planners – A**

**Developers Planners – F**

**OMB – F - - -**

## Variety of People

## Overall Grade B+

We are getting a large social housing project in the downtown. This is a triumph - unless you don't want poor people in your neighborhood. This excellent result was largely due to the developer who wanted this. The planners did well to facilitate it. Active 18 supported this. Not many residents groups do that!

**A+ to this developer.** (The same developer who got F for failing to save the old building!)

We get resident artists in two buildings, good, though the price of the units will not be any great bargain.

But not many family are likely in the typical small size units.  
And there will be rental units – Good.

## **Parks**

## **Overall Grade C+**

Jane likes busy little parks that interact with their neighborhood. (I'd give Jane a D for not appreciating big green parks. Oh apostasy! But such a wonder was not in the cards here, so, why worry.) The excuse the City doesn't have the money for a bigger park here and elsewhere is so short-sighted! We will a small park space which despite all odds has good dimensions and considerable potential. It remains to be seen whether great design will make it come alive as neighborhood centre. Planning and Parks get a fresh chance to shine.

During the planning process the identification of where this park would be located. and then it's acquisition by City staff was far too slow. The developer bought the whole block out from under the City and the City then had to buy from the developer. By the time the park was in place the ability to influence the design of its perimeter buildings was badly compromised. It's not the planners fault the City is broke but the park location could have been addressed long before the development pressures made this so much more difficult.

'Public access open space' on private land was / is a not a solution to the parks crisis.

### **Planners get D.**

Yes, Council spent their whole parks trust fund on this park. Sure, we're grateful. But the bigger issue is, why are Parks are so woefully under funded. Our local councilor was not fighting the bigger issue. Where is a champion for public parks at City Council?

### **Local Councilor gets a D.**

## **Architecture**

Jane was not big on architecture. Street life was her thing. Planning mattered here but not so much architectural design. Still you can divine that monotonous, bland buildings, disproportionate to their neighbours, would not be loved.

All the buildings in the first three projects are bland and boring with Westside slightly ahead on points. The Bohemian building along Queen is all wrong for the neighbourhood. The planners have no control over design.

Tall buildings with a small floor plate are ok for intensification. But we didn't get small floor plates. The Planners take a hit for this goof.

### **Architects**

- 150 Sudbury - C-
- 48 Abell – D
- 1171 Queen – E

### **Planners - D**