



Livable
by design

URBAN DESIGN MANUAL

Stable Residential Areas Zoning and Design Open Houses: Consultation Summary

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1. Introduction

Since the Livable Oakville Plan was passed in 2009, the Town of Oakville has undertaken a number of projects to plan for the future, with the aim of creating the most livable town in Canada. Two of those are the inZone project – the preparation of a new Zoning By-law – and Livable by Design – the preparation of a new Urban Design Manual.

At the inZone subcommittee meeting of October 22, 2012, staff outlined its consultation plan on a particular component of the Livable by Design project, the Design Guidelines for Stable Residential Neighbourhoods. Staff for the Livable by Design project, along with staff from the inZone project team, together created a series of open houses to gather resident input on building issues to be addressed by these two projects.

2. Purpose of the Open Houses

The open houses were designed to educate and inform residents on regulatory and guidance documents that address building and development within stable neighbourhoods. The consultation was undertaken by assembling a number of display panels with summary information on zoning and design issues, and by delivering a presentation on those issues.

3. Format of the Open Houses

Upon signing in, attendees proceeded toward the display of panels summarizing a series of important zoning and design issues. Multiple means for providing comment were given to attendees: Post-it notes for applying written comments onto the applicable panel, Vision 2057 feedback pages for longer comment, and email addresses for providing detailed comment with attachments. Staff were available to answer any attendee questions about zoning or design issues. Brochures were additionally available on current town projects (i.e. Vision 2057, inZone) and on departments and programs related to new residential development.

A presentation was provided approximately 20 minutes into the event. Staff opened with a brief explanation of the purpose of the open house, along with a summary of some of the tools that municipalities can use to regulate residential development. Zoning content was provided, followed by the design presentation. Staff examined some issues in the context of stable residential neighbourhoods, and explained the concepts of compatibility through a number of graphics and examples drawn from current regulations and policy documents.

The final portion of the open house was devoted to a question and answer session where attendees could ask their questions to members of staff. At the Iroquois Ridge Open House, there was no formal question and answer period. Attendees instead discussed their questions with members of staff in a more dispersed way, similar to the panel

discussion at the outset. Questions and answers from these sessions were recorded by a member of staff.

4. Location of the Open Houses

The table below shows the time, date, location, and attendance of the five open houses.

Meeting	Date and Time	Location	Attendance
1	November 15, 2012; 7:00 p.m. to 8:30 p.m.	St. Joseph's Church, 2451 Old Bronte Road	9
2	November 20, 2012; 7:00 p.m. to 8:30 p.m.	Iroquois Ridge High School, 1123 Glenashton Drive	5
3	November 21, 2012; 7:00 p.m. to 8:30 p.m.	Queen Elizabeth Park Community and Cultural Centre, 2302 Bridge Road	15
4	November 22, 2012; 3:00 p.m. to 4:30 p.m.	Town Hall, 1225 Trafalgar Road	9
5	November 22, 2012; 7:00 p.m. to 8:30 p.m.	Town Hall, 1225 Trafalgar Road	13

5. Key Themes Heard

Attendees raised a number of issues with staff, both at the presentations and through written correspondence afterward. Five themes, in particular, emerged from the consultation process.

5.1 *Building Size and Massing*

Residents were concerned with the size and scale of new dwellings being constructed in older areas; particularly, the relation of the size of the new dwellings against existing dwellings. At the Iroquois Ridge open house, one resident noted that some older areas of Oakville now contain more new dwellings than old ones. Staff responded that as housing preferences have changed over time, new homes being built are much larger than the older housing stock.

Zoning currently regulates the size and massing of buildings through floor area/lot ratio (FA/LR) and lot coverage regulations. The current by-law thus has two massing controls at present, with the two regulations not producing a similar built form. Residents were concerned that developers are known to push the envelope regarding the size of dwellings they can build. Staff indicated extensive testing and modelling of current and future regulations has occurred and will continue to occur.

5.2 *Privacy Issues*

Concerns were raised by attendees about privacy, as a taller structure may look out onto a neighbour's property. This is partly affected by the massing and height of buildings, and partly by setbacks and required yards—where a building can be placed. The most important yard regarding privacy concerns is the rear yard; front and side yard projections don't typically affect privacy.

The placement of windows, doors, decks, and balconies was very important to attendees for ensuring the privacy of their rear and side yards from neighbouring development. One resident inquired about projections into required setbacks, such as balconies and decks.

5.3 *Height*

Related to the massing of buildings is the issue of height. A number of points were raised regarding the effects of houses that are demonstrably taller than others in the neighbourhood. Higher ceilings are now the standard, which attendees believed are challenging the current height standard.

Design standards address this issue by recommending that higher portions of a façade be stepped back, and that the overall structure be “broken up.” A two-storey house next to a one-storey house could include a one-storey element on the side facing the bungalow next door. Examples of newer homes were cited by attendees that maintained a consistent scale with their neighbours through building a smaller second storey.

Staff considered it to be unlikely that height maximums will be tightened, as the 9.0 metre maximum is already among the most restrictive in Ontario. However, there were requests both to reduce the maximum height permitted and to consider an increased maximum. One resident also expressed concern that restricting height leads to a large number of dwellings with flat or flatter roofs.

Since the open houses, staff have received two pieces of correspondence suggesting that zone standards be relaxed and not tightened.

5.4 *Turning Guidelines into Enforceable Regulations*

Related to the massing of buildings was a discussion on the enforceability of design guidelines. Under the *Planning Act*, municipalities do not have the authority to regulate design elements or other qualitative aspects of development. The design guidelines express what kind of development Council and the community would like to see, but they are not requirements. The guidelines carry more weight when endorsed by Council, as they are an elaboration upon the policies of the Official Plan that are used to direct staff's comments on various planning applications.

It was suggested that zoning be tightened if the guidelines are not enforceable, to ensure that desirable development takes place. The town cannot block a project that complies with zoning, so the zoning framework needs to reflect the sort of massing, height, and setbacks that the town wants to see in future development.

5.5 *Communicating Intent of Guidelines to Stakeholders*

Attendees expressed their desire to have the intent of the guidelines communicated to relevant stakeholders. It was important to attendees that people are aware of what the town is doing. This ensures that the town's vision is being shared with the most directly impacted stakeholders – both builders and residents – so that input from all affected groups is considered. The open houses allowed residents to voice their concerns and was received as helpful and appreciated by attendees. Public consultation is essential to both the inZone and Livable by Design projects.