

**TO:** Philip Carvalino, Senior Planner, Etobicoke/York District, City of Toronto

**CC:** Sarah Doucette, Councillor, Ward 13, City of Toronto

**FROM:** Chris Ganowski, Vice-Chair, High Park Residents' Association

**RE:** Working Group Regarding the Daniels Corporation Condominium Development Proposal at 1844-1854 Bloor Street West, 6-14 Oakmount Road and 35 & 37 Pacific Avenue

**Concerns About the Format and Procedure of the Working Group:**

While I do believe some progress was made during the Working Group meetings examining the limited aspects of the site plan items for the proposed development at 1844 Bloor Street West, there were fundamental deficiencies in the format and procedure of the Working Group itself.

I had an expectation of the Working Group being a forum for stakeholders to present their concerns, opinions and recommendations, which would be chaired by a neutral party such as the Ward Councillor and/or staff from the City of Toronto Planning Department.

However, while the meetings were technically chaired by the Ward Councillor Sarah Doucette, they were *de facto* led by representatives from Daniels Corporation. The meetings were not a group process where new ideas could be brought to the table for discussion, but rather a reinforcement of the proposal submitted by Daniels Corporation with a limited choice of options within constrained parameters. Representatives from Daniels Corporation and Diamond Schmidt Architects had the floor for disproportionately long amounts of time compared to the other members of the Working Group.

Despite requesting an agenda and list of participants before the first meeting from both City Planning staff and Councillor Doucette, I did not receive any information before the meeting. Further, written agendas were not distributed at the first meeting or before the remaining two meetings. Minutes from meetings were not distributed until the following meeting, instead of the interim. All of these factors made it difficult for participants to properly prepare for meetings.

The first meeting consisted of a long review of the history of the development and description of the proposal. As the members of the Working Group have been closely following this development proposal for the past 18 months, the review was largely unnecessary and could have been truncated to allow more time for discussion.

Environmental engineer from the City of Toronto Planning Department, Shayna Scott, only attended the final meeting. As the meeting primarily consisted of a presentation of changes, rather than a discussion, there was minimal opportunity for Shayna to offer insights and discuss environmental issues with the group. Further, without attending the first two meetings, Shayna could not make specific comments on environmental issues due to not having an in-depth knowledge of the Working Group proceedings.

My recommendations for future Working Groups:

- establish a neutral Chair for the Working Group who will moderate opposing views and allow all members to participate equally
- distribute a list of participants before any meetings are held (attain permission from individuals to respect privacy concerns)
- distribute a written overall purpose/goal of the Working Group as well as written agendas before each meeting
- distribute minutes in the interim between meetings
- require that neutral members of the Working Group, such as City Planning staff, attend all meetings

### **Disappointment Over the Scope and Mandate of the Working Group:**

Beyond the abovementioned concerns regarding the format and procedure of the Working Group, the most disconcerting item of the Working Group is its limited scope and mandate.

By appealing the re-zoning and Official Plan amendment components of the development proposal to the Ontario Municipal Board (OMB), Daniels Corporation has clearly indicated their having no desire to negotiate with residents as to the height, size and shape of the development.

I regard Daniels Corporation removing any discussion about height and massing – the dominant concerns of local residents – from City-led venues of discussion as ignoring the primary concerns of the community. The remaining aspects of the proposal, examined by the Working Group, are secondary concerns at best.

### **Comments About the Outcomes of the Working Group:**

As I expressed at the Working Group meetings, I recommend that the development include a higher proportion of brick and stone – especially in the central component of the building. A different option voiced at the Working Group meetings to adapt the glass façade of the building was using fritted glass for the balconies.

The fritted glass will aid in making the building more bird-friendly because it, together with the shadow resulting from overhanging balconies, it will break up the wall surface so that the birds will perceive it as a solid object. However, in aesthetic terms, it does little to integrate the building into the character of the surrounding buildings to the east and west along Bloor Street. The use of a higher proportion of brick and stone – especially in the central façade – would aid greatly in keeping to the style of the neighbourhood. On a positive note, I was delighted that the vertical green pieces of glass will be removed from the central façade of the building.

The decision to use a small amount of additional limestone at the north entrance to the lobby is promising, but much more stone, rather than glass, would be preferable.

There were many positive aspects of the landscape designs discussed during the Working Group meetings. I am delighted that the courtyard at the front of the building will incorporate a “table-top” underground design that will allow for the growth of tree roots for full maturity (30 – 50 cm trunk diameter over 30 – 40 years) and that the landscape architects have worked with groups from High Park to use trees and plants native to the park. However, these efforts do little to address the fact that over 50 mature trees will be destroyed to allow for this development.

I like the inclusion of a bioswale consisting of local grasses that will extend along the property between the sidewalk and Bloor Street. My only concern is that the condo board continue to maintain and fund the bioswale after Daniels Corporation releases responsibility. It would be preferable to include a stipulation in the agreement establishing the condo board that the bioswale must remain and cannot be removed to reduce condo maintenance costs.

It is also positive that the sidewalk along Bloor Street will be multiple times wider than a regulation City of Toronto sidewalk, but unfortunate that it will be achieved by parts of the east and west wings of the building overhanging the sidewalk. It would have been preferable for the building to be set back further from the property line without having to overhang parts of the building above the sidewalk.

I was dismayed to discover that while Daniels Corporation purchased the TTC lands immediately north of the development site and will pursue re-zoning of the land for the development of a daycare amenity, no such amenity will be built in the near term.

After using the daycare amenity as a justification for giving back to the community, Daniels Corporation will receive the benefits of a lower FSI (Floor Space Index) density rating resulting from purchasing more property, while not actually providing a daycare amenity to the community. It was stated at the Working Group meetings that an investment partner could not be found either from the City or the private sector. I would assume that with the severe lack of daycare (to say nothing of affordable day care) in the city of Toronto, and the importance of developing daycare amenities in our ward in particular (as evidenced by one of the most important issues in the latest municipal election), there would be a solution to finding funding. Have all avenues been considered? For example, maybe there are provincial or federal grants available.

A subsequent item of disappointment involves the retail space component on the ground floor. This particular stretch of Bloor Street is lacking in retail and would benefit greatly from small local businesses in the area such as an independent coffee shop, bakery or other locally-owned small shops.

However, through discussions at the Working Group meetings, it became clear that Daniels Corporation is planning on including only 3 large retail units in the building design.

With such a small number of units, the size of each retail space will be too large – and too expensive – for small independent businesses to lease. The result will be large-scale franchise retailers – with little

connection to the local community – will be the only businesses able to afford leasing retail space in the building.

As illustrated by the items described in this letter, the positive aspects of the Working Group are highly outweighed by the negative aspects. There is still much room for improvement, within the constrained limits of the site plan items, as well as addressing the issues most important to the local community: the height and massing of the building.

Chris Ganowski

Vice-Chair

High Park Residents' Association

