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To: Members of the Planning & Transportation Committee  
City of Toronto

From: Toronto Society of Architects  
Joe Lobko, Chair

Re: Official Plan Deputation

I am here to express the support of the Toronto Society of Architects for the proposed new Toronto Official Plan.

The TSA is a volunteer organization dedicated to making this City the best place it can be through the lens of architecture and urban design. Founded in 1887, we are the oldest architectural organization in Canada. In addition to designing many of the buildings of Toronto, our members are involved in a wide range of activities within this community.

The City can be viewed as an evolving design project in which we all participate. It is ever changing in both small and large ways, with each generation building on the legacy of its predecessors. Like any good design project, it needs to have a great and compelling overall vision, within which the equally important details can unfold over time. There is a relationship in any good design project between the general and the specific, between the detail and the overall vision and a good designer has to consider the impact of one on the other. Great design rarely just happens on its own. At this time in our City's history, a few short years after the shock and stress of amalgamation, it is appropriate to step back and consider the place as a whole, to provide this overall vision.

Through amalgamation, Toronto became a much larger and more complex city. Since then, we in the development industry, have been living with a crazy quilt of often conflicting official plans, zoning by-laws, part II plans, site-specific amendments, all inherited from the constituent municipalities of Toronto. While the amalgamation process continues to be controversial, surely one of the clear benefits is the potential to create a broad, idea laden, vision for all of Toronto. We feel that this proposed Official Plan does just that.

Growth is a defining element of a healthy city and the management of that growth, as partly described in an official plan, a defining element of healthy government. The continuing pattern of poorly controlled suburban sprawl is not a sign of a healthy region or healthy government.

To manage our continued growth, the plan proposes a combined strategy of neighbourhood preservation, identification of areas for growth, (primarily along the avenues), and suggestions regarding transportation options that evolve from existing strategies to support that growth. This strategy is simple, straightforward, environmentally defensible, consistent with the historical traditions of Toronto development and the traditional form of the City, and ultimately logical and visionary. It just makes so much sense.

Is there a better strategy out there to manage the growth of our city over the next 30 years? In the many meetings that I have attended regarding the official plan, I've heard a lot of fears expressed, I've heard lawyers debating terminology, I've heard opinions about what an official plan is supposed to be and what it isn't supposed to be, but I haven't heard a single compelling alternative vision for the growth of the amalgamated city.

I would underline and support the comments of Mr. Bedford, this morning, regarding the relationship between an official plan and a zoning by-law and their need to be complementary and not redundant documents, subject to conflicts of interpretation. I would ask those residents and councilors, who have expressed great fear regarding the impacts that growth may have on their neighbourhoods to consider that this is not, in my view, the end of a process...this is the beginning. An overall vision is before us for consideration, one which clearly identifies where the growth should take place. If we can all agree on the fundamental logic of that vision before us, then we can all work together to work out the details. And I would agree with those who say the details matter very much. Of course they do, but I would argue that we first need a framework within which those details can evolve. Four storey avenues may make sense in some areas and eight storey avenues in others. And in our view there is a place in our city for tall buildings too.

Will this plan guarantee a level of clarity and consensus that will free us from future development disputes? No, of course it won't, but that is not a reason not to embrace this vision wholeheartedly and to work to make it the best plan that it can be. I have heard some debate about legal terminology and how one turn of phrase is going to work and how another will not in assuring a predictable outcome. Sure, let's get the terminology as clear as possible, but notwithstanding our best efforts in this regard, developers and community groups will continue to hire lawyers in the future who will argue alternative interpretations...and as someone else has said, the OMB is someone else's jurisdiction. Let's control what we can control, and not be overwhelmed by what we can't.

Let us be motivated by the politics of vision rather than the politics of fear. To date, debate on this plan has been energetic, to say the least, and quite informative. Many of us have learned a great deal about this city over the past few months. Let us continue this debate, however let us debate what is actually in the plan, its essential ideas and its vision, and not by what we fear it might bring. Let us not be distracted in a deferral based on a concern for detail, as a means of deferring the clear vision that this plan represents.

As an organization we support the creative vision shown by this new plan and encourage its endorsement by this Committee and Council. As architects we look forward to working with this document as a means of creating an even greater and more beautiful City of Toronto.

Sincerely,

Joe Lobko  
TSA Chair 2002