Urban Design Compatibility Analysis

Proposed Residential Development
105 Avondale Court and 143 Blue Water Place
City of Burlington

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1. Introduction

This urban design analysis has been prepared by Weston Consulting on behalf of First Urban Inc., the owners of the site located at 105 Avondale Court and 143 Blue Water Place in the City of Burlington. The purpose of the report is to provide an assessment of a proposed residential townhouse development on the said property. The basis of the assessment is to analyze compatibility of the proposed development with the surrounding context.

It should be noted that the images contained in this document are only a conceptual representation of the intended version and character of the development. In this regard, they should not be construed or interpreted literally as to what will be constructed.

Figure 1 - Location Map
2. The Site and Surrounding Area

The subject site is located on the north-western shores of Lake Ontario, at the southern edges of the City of Burlington. Informally, the site is within what is known as the “Platinum Belt” lands that extend from Brant Street in Burlington to Hurontario Street in Mississauga along Lake Ontario. This area represents luxury living with multi-million dollar residences taking advantage of lake side views and access. The subject site comprises of two parcels municipally known as 105 Avondale Court and 143 Blue Water Place. The total area of the site measures 1.62 hectares. 143 Bluewater Place includes a private road from Lakeshore Road to the north. 105 Avondale Court in its current condition has only 16 metres of a street line on Avondale Court through a second private driveway. Overall, the subject site does not have street frontage or exposure to the public realm. However, the site’s exposure to Lake Ontario to the south will provide opportunities for establishing visual connections and will be a strong catalyst in informing the design process.

The subject site is surrounded by residential developments to the north, east and west with the exception of Lake Ontario to the south. These residential developments can be described as executive type lots with single detached residences and generous building setbacks. The buildings are a mix of bungalow type residences and comparatively newer buildings 2-3 storeys high. The overall ambiance is of a lush green neighbourhood with single detached residences of an upscale character.
3. The Development Concept

The development concept builds on the potentials of a lake oriented site in a natural green setting and also works with the limitations in terms of street frontage and access. Figure 3 illustrates the concept with 39 two storey executive townhouses. A total number of (8) eight blocks with units ranging from 2 to 8 units per block will be arranged along a pedestrian promenade. All parking will be provided in an underground parking level accessed through a ramp. The units will also be accessible from the underground parking level through private individual elevators.

The pedestrian promenade forms the main structuring element of the proposed community providing access to all units. The design essence of this esplanade is to celebrate the pedestrian scale and provide future residents with an opportunity to experience the lake from different vantage points. It also serves as a communal amenity space bridging the building blocks and providing an intimately scaled interface between the private and semi-private realms of the development.

The concept also considers shore protection by limiting buildings within the Engineered Development Setbacks (EDS) and providing buffers from the natural heritage feature within the site.

Figure 3 - Concept development
4. Compatibility

4.1 City of Burlington Official Plan Office consolidation July 2015

Section 2.2.2 (c) of the City of Burlington Official Plan Office consolidation July 2015 (BOP 2015) includes policies for Low Density Residential land use and states that:

in Residential-Low Density areas, single-detached and semi-detached housing units with a density of maximum 25 units per net hectare shall be permitted. In addition, other forms of ground oriented housing units with a density of maximum 25 units per net hectare may be permitted, provided that these forms are compatible with the scale, urban design and community features of the neighbourhood.

The BOP 2015 defines **Compatibility** as:

Development or re-development that is capable of co-existing in harmony with, and that will not have an undue physical (including form) or functional adverse impact on existing or proposed development in the area or pose an unacceptable risk to environmental and/or human health. Compatibility should be evaluated in accordance with measurable/objective standards where they exist, based on criteria such as aesthetics, noise, vibration, dust, odours, traffic, safety and sun-shadowing, and the potential for serious adverse health impacts on humans or animals.

4.2 Draft City of Burlington Official Plan

The City of Burlington is undertaking its 5 year Municipal Comprehensive Review of their Official Plan. As part of this exercise, Council has requested that the Planning Department review development pressures in specific neighbourhoods (i.e. Character Areas of Indian Point, Roseland and Shoreacres) and create guidelines for new developments in these areas. The subsequent Character Area Studies resulted in proposed zoning and Official Plan policy changes, including revisions to existing definitions. The definition of **Compatibility**, as illustrated in the previous section, has been modified to provide clarity and intent:

development or re-development which may or may not be the same as or similar to existing development, but that is capable of co-existing in harmony with, and that will not have an undue physical (including form) or functional adverse impact on, existing or proposed development in the area or pose an acceptable risk to environmental and/or human health. Compatibility should be evaluated in accordance with measurable/objective standards, where they exist, and is divided into two types:

i) Land Use Compatibility - includes criteria such as, but not limited to: noise, vibration, air quality (e.g. odors, dust and other air emissions), traffic, safety, wind, sun-shadowing, and the potential for serious adverse health impacts on humans and animals; and
ii) Design Compatibility - includes criteria such as, but not limited to: scale, height, massing, articulation, architectural elements such as cladding materials, windows and type of roof, landscaping, fencing and context.

5. Expression of Compatibility

This section provides a discussion on design compatibility and is provided by Thomas Payne Architect, the project’s architectural consultant. The discussion evolves around the issues of built form, landscape, scale, material and building craft.

The proposed complex of garden townhomes on the lake is a reflection of best practices of redevelopment at this time. It recognizes the desirability of intensifying housing in urban areas in a manner that respects the existing landscape and building fabric while developing new appropriate typologies.

The proposed townhome scheme is compatible with the highly heterogeneous existing Burlington shoreline architecture. Over time, “The-Enclave-on-the-Lake” will produce a distinguished addition to the built form of Burlington.

5.1. Compatibility of Form

There is no singular stylistic expression or housing form that dominates the surrounding residential fabric. As pointed out earlier, the buildings of the neighbourhood range from cottage-like dwellings from the original era when this part of Burlington was a summer community, to the recent past when large new two- and three-storey homes predominate.

The building form proposed in this submission is consistent with the current trend towards intensification of use and intensification of density. The forms associated with the proposal are all in keeping with the scale of the existing. The proposal calls for small footprint, low height townhomes of high quality.

5.2. Compatibility of Landscape

The big idea of the townhome proposal for the site is to slip both the parking and the townhomes into the centre of the existing lot, respecting the mature heritage landscape and removing as few trees as possible. The predominant mature growth is at the perimeter of the lot and forms a very strong visual barrier to adjacent properties, and also frames views to the lake, which the proposal celebrates and enhances.

Car access, except for emergency vehicles is below grade in a central concealed parking level. Pedestrian-level spaces above make reference to the great typological spaces of our history:
arrival courtyard, promenade, small pocket square, and mews lane, organizing the pedestrian circulation, producing an intimately-scaled but very logical network of pleasing surface spaces.

5.3. Compatibility of Scale

Because vehicular access to all the units is from the lower level parking, invisible to the eye, the buildings, two-storey townhomes, organized in clusters to be in scale with the existing residential fabric, are accessed directly from grade. In other words, they have no stoops but instead have ground level entries directly from grade. And with modest floor to floor dimensions and two-storey height at the perimeter, the houses will have a diminutive but very elegant feel on the site. Intermediate scale modulation of the facades with alternating projecting bays and recesses will produce a picturesque effect and reinforce the garden setting. Flat roofs further diminish the visual impact of the townhomes.

The houses will dissolve into the heritage landscape.

5.4. Compatibility of Material and Building Craft

Although early in the design stage, the townhomes have been conceptualized as elegant, small-scaled but with a contemporary feel. Large windows take advantage of the lake views, and also to produce a modern progressive forward-looking image for a marketplace that is looking for fresh ideas and expression. The townhomes will be finished in warm natural materials. Stone, wood, and eternal metal will predominate with small flashes of colour in both the architecture and landscape at points of entry.

Conclusion

In conclusion, Thomas Payne Architect is confident that the proposed townhome scheme will be a valuable addition to its Burlington community. It will enhance the neighbourhood, create no adverse impacts, and will support and strengthen land values. It respects the overall Official Plan vision for the area and is compliant with the spirit of local zoning requirements.

Thomas Payne Architect believes that over time, “The-Enclave-on-the-Lake” will produce a distinguished addition to the built form of Burlington.

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6. Analysis and Discussion

This section includes an analysis of the concept development in regard to the land use and built form criteria including scale, height, massing, cladding material, landscaping and context. It will also discuss how the proposed development will exist in harmony with the surrounding lands while establishing its own identity and creating a sense of place. For the purpose of the analysis, the area bounded by Lakeshore Road to the north, Pickens Lane to the east, Secord Lane to the west and Lake Ontario to the south is taken into consideration. This area includes 40 residential lots zoned as R1.2 including the two parcels of the subject site.

6.1 Land Use Compatibility

In terms of land use compatibility, the proposed residential development does not affect the current residential land use of the surrounding area as there will be no adverse impact in regard to noise, vibration, air quality, safety, wind and sun shadowing.

Noise: It is anticipated that a noise level similar to that of the surrounding area will be generated due to the proposed residential use. A noise feasibility study will be provided to review and ensure adequate noise levels are maintained.

Vibration: No adverse vibration will be created as non-residential uses generating unfavourable vibration is not being proposed. Any potential vibration sources will be contained below ground and enclosed within the parking garage.

Air quality: For similar reasons, there will be no hazardous/toxic emissions that might affect the air quality. Moreover, the preservation of existing mature and healthy trees on site and the planting of new ones will enhance the air quality and maintain the ambiance of the area.

Safety: The proposed development will be secluded and sheltered from the surrounding developments. The siting of the townhouse buildings will ensure “eyes on the street” i.e. visual connections and natural surveillance will be established by orienting the units towards the mews. Further, the development will be located outside of any hazard lands and the shore wall will meet all required protection standards.
Wind: No adverse wind effects are anticipated due to the proposed height, scale and massing of the buildings.

Sun shadowing: The height and bulk of the buildings, as well as their separation distances from neighbouring buildings, will mitigate sun-shadow impacts.

The proposed development will make efficient use of the subject site. The two parcels in their current conditions are under utilized and not in character with the surrounding 38 residential lots in terms of built-to-open space ratio, lot area and building setbacks (Figure 4).

The proposed concept illustrates a balanced proportion of buildings and open spaces thus creating a positive built-to-open space relationship while protecting the shores of the lake and natural features within the site. In our opinion, this not only represents compatible land use with the surrounding area but also enhances the residential land use with a more contributive development.

Figure 4 - Illustration depicting the proposed and existing relationship of built-to-open spaces.
6.2 Design Compatibility- scale, height and massing

The existing surrounding residential buildings are showing a transition in scale and character. The height of the existing surrounding residential buildings range from one to three storeys. The older residences are of a cottage style and typically one to two storeys in height. The more recent developments are two to three storeys high and display a variety of architectural styles and treatment and veer from the cottage styled residences. For example, the residence located on 166 Avondale Court reflects the Empire style of architecture and includes classical architectural elements such as a mansard roof, semi-circular french windows and a columned porch (Figure 7). The residence on 155 Avondale Court is built with a more modern expression (Figure 9). A three storey residence is currently under construction at 123 Avondale Court with an accentuated roof design and west facing windows (Figure 10).

In terms of design compatibility the scale, height and massing of the proposed townhouses will not be in conflict with the changing state of the surrounding buildings. The townhouses are proposed to be two storeys in height with an underground third floor accommodating parking garages and services. The main two floors will accommodate the living and bedroom areas.

Figure 5 - 160 Blue Water Place

Figure 6 - 167 Blue Water Place
The intent of the proposed design is to create a development with buildings of a similar residential scale. This will be achieved through the height and articulation of massing of the proposed townhouse buildings. Each unit is intended to be 6 metres wide and 12 metres deep. In an effort to keep the townhouse building blocks compatible with the surrounding existing buildings, the units should be arranged in a maximum eight unit configuration. This will control the length and overall volume of the townhouse building blocks. Blocks of this size are comparable to existing lots. In addition to this, the linearity of the townhouses will be articulated by staggering the units where appropriate and creating undulations (projections and recesses) in the wall planes creating a more attractive built form.

6.3 Building setbacks and separation distances

The building’s setbacks will ensure that adequate privacy, daylight penetration and landscaping opportunities prevail. The setbacks will also accommodate private amenity spaces in the form of side and rear yards that are proportionate to the individual townhouse units. The development will be isolated from the rest of the community by preserving trees which will mitigate privacy impacts. Typically the setback for the lots adjacent to surrounding lots will be 8-9 metres that will also include significant landscaping. Mature and healthy trees within these setback areas will be preserved where possible, thus reinforcing privacy and screening with the neighbouring buildings.

Figure 11 - Proposed concept in relation to surrounding buildings.
6.4 Architectural Expression

The architectural expression and character of various buildings around the subject lands are going through a transition. Although the older homes of the neighbourhood consist of the cottage style dwellings, more recent developments are being built with larger homes, two to three storeys high with various architectural expressions as discussed in Section 5.2.

In this context, the architectural expression of the townhouses may deviate from the existing residences in order to create a distinct identity and establish the project’s own vocabulary. However, the deviation should be subtle in nature and not conflict with the surrounding residential buildings. The buildings should establish a harmonious relationship through appropriate scale, massing, height and siting in relation to the surrounding buildings as discussed earlier. The colour and texture of exterior cladding materials may be inspired from the surrounding neighbourhood for better integration that will complement the substantial use of glass/glazing of a modern building.

6.5 Landscaping and Protection of Natural Heritage Features

A prevalent feature of the site and its surrounding area is the rich green environment consisting of mature trees and vegetation. An objective of the proposed
landscape design will be to maintain this character. Trees of good health should be preserved where possible and new trees should be planted to compensate for the lost ones and contribute in the City’s urban tree canopy.

The streets of this neighbourhood are intimately scaled with no sidewalks resulting in a seamless integration of the public and private realms. Although there are no streets shown in the concept, the pedestrian promenade or ‘mews’ will act as the main structuring element of the future community and resemble a similar character in terms of establishing an intimately scaled circulation spine and connections between the private and semi-private realms of the project.

Other design considerations will include protection of the lake’s shore and natural heritage features within the site. All buildings will be outside of the established Engineered Development Setbacks (EDS) and buffers and setbacks will be provided along the stormwater outfall traversing the site’s eastern border.

Figure 13 - Street view of Blue Water Place illustrating the intimate scale of the street.

Figure 14 - Conceptual section of the envisioned mews and relationship with the townhouses. Courtesy of First Urban.
7. Summary and Conclusion

The proposed development of executive townhouses will not only maintain the predominant residential land use of the area but also enhance the use with a more productive development in terms of land use efficiency. The concept proposes a unique approach in preserving the pedestrian scale of the neighbourhood with a central spine acting as a mews. The height, scale and massing of the townhouses will be articulated to establish a coherent relationship with the surrounding buildings. Setbacks and buffers will be established for the townhouses that will ensure adequate privacy and separation distance with the surrounding buildings.

Variations in the architectural expressions are encouraged to create a distinct identity. However, materials, colours and textures may be inspired from the surrounding in order to be respective of the existing built fabric and help integrate the project within the neighbourhood.

Landscaping design will be based on the preservation of the forest type setting of the area and protection of the shoreline and natural features within the site.

In summary, the proposed development of executive townhouses will be compatible with the surrounding neighbourhood in terms of:

- **land use**: the proposed land use is for residential use and both the current and draft Official Plans allow other forms of ground oriented housing, including townhouses;
- **various aspects of the built form such as height, scale, massing**: the proposed townhouse blocks will be compatible in terms of height, scale and massing with other surrounding buildings;
- **maintaining the pedestrian scale of the neighbourhood**: The proposed development is not only pedestrian oriented but will also reinforce the overall pedestrian scale of the neighbourhood;
- **preservation of the natural forested character of the area**: the intent of the proposed development is to maintain mature trees on site and mitigate any adverse impacts; and
- **noise, vibration, air quality, safety, wind and sun shadowing**: the proposed design will ensure no negative impacts of the above.

Therefore, the proposed townhouses will be consistent with the changing character of the immediate area and co-exist in harmony with the surrounding buildings without creating any adverse impact while establishing its own architectural vocabulary.