

October 15, 2013

Ms. Nina Maher
Planner, Planning and Growth Management
City of Ottawa
110 Laurier Avenue West, 4th Floor Mail Code 01-14
Ottawa, Ontario K1P 1J1

Subject: 87 Mann Avenue Site Plan and Rezoning Applications

Dear Ms. Maher,

I am writing to you in response to the letter sent to you by Action Sandy Hill (ASH) on September 28, 2013, in which they express their opposition to our proposed development plans for the property at 87 Mann. We are disappointed that the newly elected ASH board has pulled its qualified support for the proposed development without attempting to engage the project team in a constructive dialogue regarding their stated concerns. The project team has made genuine efforts to engage with both the Community Association and community at large in extensive discussions regarding the proposal before a formal application was made to the City. We have continued to keep the lines of communication open after filing the application making a presentation to the ASH board in September.

We note that ASH's letter to the project team only indicated that the board would no longer support the project without the benefit of the extensive comments that were provided to the City. Given that we have been engaged with ASH since the project's inception in October 2012, we find this approach discouraging. We are aware that the technical circulation period ended recently and that we will have the chance to formally respond to and address concerns put forward by the community and City staff. However, we think it is important at this point to retrace with our steps from the start of the project, and to specifically address the points raised in ASH's objection letter to the City.

First, I'd like to recap the steps we have undertaken since October 2012 when we secured the purchase of the St. Clement church. Our bid was selected by the seller mainly due to the fact that the church felt that our proposed plan was the only feasible option which preserved the church building. As part of our due diligence process, we conducted a pre-consultation with the City planner, met with Councilor Fleury, and made a presentation to ASH's planning committee in November 2012. This was followed by a presentation to the ASH board in January 2013, as well as a public meeting with the community at large at ASH's request in February 2013. Based on this series of consultations with all the stakeholders, we received the support letter from ASH for the project on February 14, 2013, and only at that point did we finalize the purchase of the Church. This support was based on the design we presented at that time, which proposed 63 bachelor units and included a new addition with a pitched roof replacing the old rectory which would be demolished. On June 13 (during the design development phase), we received an email from City staff providing feedback from the City's urban design planner, Randolph Wong, recommending to change the pitched roof of the addition to a flat roof to enhance the verticality of the original church building. Based on this directive from the City, our architect

proceeded to amend the designs accordingly. The final design which was submitted as part of the rezoning and site plan applications proposed 60 bachelor units, a flat roof for the building replacing the rectory and a rooftop amenity area on top of the flat roof. The rooftop amenity area is, in my opinion, the only noteworthy change from the original design.

Second, we would like to address the points raised in ASH's letter to the City and highlight that most if not all of these concerns were brought up in our earlier discussions with the ASH board and the community, and were addressed in the originally supported design. Please find below a response to the ASH concerns detailed in their letter:

- 1- ASH states that the development will obscure the church from view and find the demolition of the rectory troublesome. We have consistently advised ASH at meetings with their Board as well as the broader public that the demolition of the rectory was part of the redevelopment plan for the subject property. Although neither the church structure nor the rectory has heritage status making it possible to demolish and move forward with new construction on the totality of the site, the intent has always been to retain and repurpose the church. The combination of retention of the existing church structure and new construction was applauded by the ASH board and the community at the February public meeting. As such, we are surprised that the ASH board now finds the demolition of the rectory troublesome.

With respect to views to the church, it is important to note that the building is not a heritage building and there are no protected views set out in the Official Plan or Secondary Plan to the church structure. Further, the most prominent elements of the church including the spire and front façade retain their prominence and visibility along Mann Avenue with the revised design.

- 2- ASH suggests that the project is not consistent with the Sandy Hill Secondary Plan, which has 4 main objectives:
 - a. To preserve and enhance Sandy Hill as an attractive residential neighbourhood: the project preserves a prominent landmark building in the neighbourhood, while converting it from an institutional use (no longer viable at this location) to a residential use. The conversion of an existing institutional building to a residential use is entirely in keeping with the above objective.

The Residential Land Use policies in the Sandy Hill Secondary Plan speak to preserving and enhancing the existing stock of good housing, to distinguish among types of new housing, locate different types in areas appropriate to them and to provide a wide variety of housing types. As set out in the Planning Rationale, the proposed development will bring the subject property in conformity with the residential land use policies of the Secondary Plan by introducing a residential use on the property. Further, as the proposal is to convert an existing church structure and institutional use not an existing residential dwelling, the proposal is not impacting the existing stock of good housing in the community.

- b. To provide for a broad range of socio-economic groups: there is a lack of practical and viable residential options in Sandy Hill for individuals looking for single person dwellings, such as young professionals, professors, and mature students. While other demographics such as families and young students may be well served in Sandy Hill, this project attempts to meet a different type of demand in the community for an underserved segment which adds diversity and balance to the community. It is also important to note that the proposal can accommodate a range of demographic profiles as the building has been made fully accessible.
- c. To accept a modest increase in population, primarily as a way of housing some of the growth in the Central Area labour force: this project is the ideal housing option for professors, teacher assistants and young professionals who are looking to live centrally in the city on their own and are not interested in sharing a multi-bedroom apartment with other roommates, or live in a basement of a single family home, which are the two most common alternatives currently found in Sandy Hill.
- d. To maintain and coordinate both the local functions of Sandy Hill (primarily as a residential neighbourhood) and the functions that serve a wider area (e.g. the mainstreet mixed uses area along Rideau Street and the University of Ottawa): the project provides a balanced mix of residential and limited commercial space intended to serve the future residents of the building and the surrounding neighbourhood. Mann Avenue is one of main traffic arteries in Sandy Hill, and while not zoned as a Traditional Mainstreet, has many mainstreet characteristics including the adjacent commercial strip mall, other types of higher density housing projects plus the previous church use.

3- Density:

- a. The original design supported by ASH had a unit count of 63, which has been reduced to 60 units in this re-iteration resulting in a slight reduction in the overall density. Population density is therefore less than originally proposed and supported by ASH. It is therefore surprising that density has been raised as a concern at this point in time as the overall unit count has been reduced.
- b. ASH suggests that the current density in Sandy Hill is 100 people per hectare; which I assume is the average for the entire neighbourhood (including various types of housings with various densities such as single family homes, multi-unit buildings, condo buildings, etc.), and this should not be compared to the population density for a specific development. Our project is classified as a multi-unit apartment building; the City of Ottawa Official Plan states that apartment units fall under the High Density category and have a density range of **300 and over persons per hectare**. As these are single person dwellings, the building is designed to house 60 people (and not 120 as implied in their letter); this equals a density of 400 persons per hectare, which is in line with the Official Plan.

- c. One last point to with respect to density is that if we were only focused on achieving a maximum population density on the site rather than build a quality development, we would be looking to convert/build a rooming house on this site which is allowed under the current zoning and could be achieved without requiring a minor variance or rezoning. Based on massing studies conducted by our architect, we would be able to easily achieve 55 rooms with 2 beds per room, which would translate into a population density of over 730 persons per hectare. However, at this point we are committed to pursuing this project as presented to the public and submitted to the City for review.

4- Height:

The difference in height between the original and current design is very modest and largely results from the significant grade change that occurs across the property. It is noteworthy that the current Institutional zoning permits a maximum height limit of 15 m whereas a height of 11.97 m is being proposed. An increase of less than 1 m is being sought only for the portion of the building located within the Residential Fourth Density zone which has an allowable height of 11 m. Under the existing zoning, the institutionally zoned lands could be developed to a height of 15 m and converted to a land use permitted in the Institutional zoning.

5- Setbacks:

- a. The 4-storey addition in place of the garage was part of our original design and presentation which was supported by ASH.
- b. The north setback and massing of the existing Church is not being changed in any significant way, as it relates to the neighbor to the north. This neighbor will have the same view from their living spaces and rear yard.
- c. The sun shadow simulation conducted by the architect was done according to industry standards and confirms that there is minimal noticeable increase in shadow effect from the new project design on neighbouring properties than the current built form.
- d. The addition of 14 window dormers was part of the original design which was supported by ASH. Furthermore, our architect can demonstrate that there is minimal line-of-site to the two neighbouring properties, hence loss of privacy has been taken into account as part of the design and addressed by the architect in both design schemes.

6- Parking:

- a. The parking requirement for the current design is even less than what we would have required in our original presentation, mainly due to reduction of the unit count from 63 to 60 and reduction in the leasable commercial space in the basement by 50% (we are now proposing to dedicate half of the basement space as amenity, whereas in the original

proposal the entire basement was presented as leasable commercial space with a community focus).

- b. The parking requirements are further alleviated by the proximity of the site to neighbourhood amenities including transit, the provision of a quality bike parking facilities and availability of VRTUCAR in the neighbourhood. We would like to work with VRTUCAR to add a dedicated spot as part of this proposal and understand that VRTUCAR already has a significant number of cars available in the immediate area. It should also be noted that most grocery stores offer a delivery service which further compensates for car ownership dependency and hence lower parking requirements.
- c. It is important to note that the proposed residential development will have a lower traffic impact and parking demand than the previous Church use. The previous church use did not provide any off-street parking for its parishioners and relied on the existing on-street parking to serve the generated demand. Church uses are generally intensive both in terms of the traffic generation and demand for parking. In comparison, the number of units proposed as part of this proposal does not typically trigger the requirement for a traffic study (although one was completed as an exercise in diligence) and based on the results will not generate anywhere near the same amount of traffic or parking demand as the previous use.

7- Amenity Space:

The addition of the roof-top patio is the main difference between the proposed and previous design. It is important to us to achieve a quality development on the subject property to make the units attractive to a broader demographic and providing usable, well-designed outdoor amenity areas is one way to achieve this. At the same time, we understand the community's concerns with respect to possible negative impacts. We have always vocalized our commitment to maintaining an active role on the property in the form of a management company and are further committed to implementing use controls for the rooftop patio (limitations on hours of use, restricting access after hours, etc.) so there are no undue adverse impacts on the adjacent neighbours as a result.

It is noteworthy that the outdoor amenity area was designed with the protection of adjacent residential properties in mind. The roof-top elements such as pergolas and railing have been setback from the edge of the roof, minimizing the overall height and limiting opportunity for overlook into adjacent properties. The amenity area has also been oriented towards Mann Avenue and Russell Avenue and located as far away as possible from adjacent residential properties providing significant distance separation. Our architect is also working on further design revisions to address visual concerns being raised and would have welcomed ASH's direct engagement on this topic.

8- Other issues:

The exterior design is still at an early stage of the design development and subject to further detailing by our architect who welcomes the community's feedback as he continues with design revisions. With

regards to the choice of materials, it should be noted that this selection will tie in with the exterior design by the architect in conjunction with the community's input, and only durable long-lasting materials approved by the building code will be used. Specific examples of other projects where improper application of materials may have led to unreliable results should not be applied to this project, but we recognize that such examples provide lessons to be learned and need not be repeated. The cement board panels being proposed have been widely used across the country and in this city, often by very high end custom homes and multiunit residential such as the recent and very successful Beaver Barracks project.

In summary, the change from a pitched to a flat roof is only a cosmetic matter which is part of a customary evolution of a design and one which was implemented at the request of the City's urban design planner. The concern about the roof-top amenity space, while we do recognize as valid, can be addressed and controlled in various ways which we have already started planning for. Our decision to proceed with this project and invest a significant amount of money in this project has always been based on the community being onboard with our development plans which was confirmed by ASH's support letter. We have been transparent and genuine in our engagement with the City, the community and ASH and will continue in this way as the project moves forward.

Thank you in advance for your consideration and we look forward to receiving the comments submitted during the technical circulation period. We appreciate the input we have received to date and continue to be open to further communications and discussions with all interested stakeholders.

Sincerely,



Rakan Abushaar
Director

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Cc: Mathieu Fleury, Councilor, Ward 12

Chad Rollins, Vice President – Action Sandy Hill