

Gow's Bridge



Linking the Old University Neighbourhood to the City of Guelph since 1897

Old University Neighbourhood Residents' Association Inc.

Letter to Guelph City Council Concerning 4-Plexes - 4 April 2024

Members of the Guelph City Council,

While the Old University Neighbourhood Residents Association does not have a specific recommendation in regard to 4-Plexes as a right for residential intensification, we have had extensive conversations within the executive on some of the issues that would come from such a decision. Further, many of our executive members attended the city sponsored meeting on gentle intensification on 22 February 2024 at Harcourt United Church. So we feel we have informed ourselves reasonably well on some of the issues. We outline our thoughts and concerns below.

First, we as our Residents' Association are in favour of intensification and we do not wish to have a NIMBY reaction to the very real needs to have more housing in our city. We need more housing including in the Old University Neighbourhood.

Perhaps to best illustrate our concerns, we can ground them in a particular example of intensification that is happening right now in our neighbourhood. On Forest Street, we had a single-family home demolished and now we have three lots, with three houses each with an accessory apartment and also a granny flat behind each. These will be rented to students. We calculate, from ads posted on a student housing website, that we will have 24 students in what was once a single-family home. We see a number of issues arising from this kind of "gentle intensification".

First, The Committee of Adjustment approved a minor variance from the mandated 15 m frontage to 11.9 m. (We argued unsuccessfully that this was not a minor variance.) We asked the Committee on what basis they were making their decision. Would 10 m now be okay if someone asked? If frontage will be changed in a major way it should be done through a proper bylaw process. Without such assurance uncertainty will reign in our neighbourhood.

We have watched this property, which previously was well treed, clear-cut. How will intensification save trees and help the city meet its tree canopy goals?

We have a number of student houses in our neighbourhood and consistently there are many cars that fill up driveways and spill onto the street. We wonder what will happen when 24 students, many with cars, park in front of this newly intensified area. From our experience in the neighbourhood the ratio of students to cars is often approaching one to one. It seems to us that intensification without some careful thinking around parking – licensing street parking? – for example will lead to problems.

Some of our members sense that the business model is changing with the possibilities of intensification. Housing is being further commoditized and monetarized. When a single lot with a single house can be made into three and filled with student renters at \$1100 per room it is very difficult for a family wishing to buy that house to compete. Moving from a 3-Plex to 4-Plex would make this even more difficult. We feel that the very neighbourhood character could change very quickly, and we would lose the family character of our Old University area. It seems to us that a blanket change for whole type of residential area without some sort of nuance and design guidelines would not be beneficial overall to our neighbourhood.

In the presentation models shown by consultants on gentle intensification on 22 February the biggest take away that we had was that there was no backyard, little tree coverage and that any “empty space” would be a parking lot. The planners acknowledged this. Cars and parking are a huge issue. The designs that they presented, while attractive in many ways, were completely undercut by the turning of each lot into nothing but a structure and parking. This would destroy the character of our neighbourhood. There needs to be a better way – and a better way to balance off concerns of housing without paving a neighbourhood.

We urge City Council to take a nuanced and granular approach to the intensification process. For example, many of us have looked at the major arteries in the city and how intensification has occurred, for example along Gordon Street. Could not something similar happened along College Avenue and Edinburgh Road.

Thank you for your consideration.

Your truly,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "John Lawson". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a prominent loop at the end.

John Lawson
President OUNRA