

# Quinpool footprint: Developers must follow the rules

Published January 13, 2015 - 4:33pm



The corner of Quinpool and Robie streets in Halifax: "If the two proposals proceed, we'd get a massive block of towers with more traffic, noise, shadow, wind and a much larger carbon footprint," say critics. (ERIC WYNNE/Staff)

## Why is another Halifax neighbourhood up for grabs?

HRM's Municipal Planning Strategy and Land Use By-law were intended to guide a rational planning process for the city. They were developed through extensive public consultation and approved by our elected representatives on HRM council. By representing citizens' shared view of what constitutes "the public good," these documents should minimize individual negotiations with private interests.

If circumstances in HRM change substantially, these documents permit some flexibility through a "development agreement." The application by APL Properties (George Armoyan) for a development agreement on the north side of Quinpool Road, between Robie and Windsor, seeks an exemption from the height limits on that site so that two towers can be built.

One proposed tower is 12 storeys (2.5 times the allowable maximum at the corner of Windsor). The second is 28 storeys (twice the maximum at the corner of Robie), which would become the third tallest building in Halifax, below only Fenwick Tower and Purdy's Wharf Tower 2.

The application by Westwood Developments (Danny Chedrawe) on Robie north of Quinpool includes a 24-storey tower (six times the maximum for that site).

Both developers also want an exemption from the requirement that buildings be set back 10 to 20 feet from the street and adjacent properties. This would defeat the purpose of the setback: to reduce negative impacts on adjacent properties and sidewalks, such as less sunlight and stronger winds.

The proposed heights, unit density and population density on these two sites are not permitted under the existing statutes and are absolutely incompatible with the neighbourhoods north and south of Quinpool.

The combined developments would have a unit density of 196 dwellings per acre and a population density of 528 persons per acre. Their total floor area would cover these properties 10.1 times, a ratio typical in New York City but hardly in keeping with this part of Halifax, where the ratio is less than 1.0.

The overwhelming bulk of the developments is obvious; other impacts are harder to see. Houses in the immediate area would be degraded by noise, shadow and wind. Nearby property values also would be affected.

Assessments and rents would increase, likely to the point where locally owned, independent businesses on Quinpool Road would be replaced by national franchises and big-box stores.

These developments also would set a precedent for “spot re-zoning” in this area: on the former St. Patrick’s High School site to the west; the vacant block south of the Atlantica Hotel, between Pepperell and Shirley; and the Quinpool site currently occupied by Ben’s Bakery.

Have circumstances changed sufficiently to warrant an exponential increase beyond the allowable maximum? No. Neither developer has demonstrated this.

But what about our current enthusiasm for residential intensification in central Halifax? Intensification is a relative term, so let’s keep things in perspective. We needn’t make up for decades of suburban sprawl all at once, at Robie and Quinpool. Halifax is not New York City. The Common is not Central Park. Besides, Stantec’s 2013 study for HRM concluded that the density targets in the Municipal Planning Strategy can be achieved within the current height limits.

If the two proposals proceed, we’d get a massive block of towers with more traffic, noise, shadow, wind and a much larger carbon footprint. As far as we can tell, Halifax would gain no affordable family housing.

The proposed developments want to take advantage of aerial views of the Halifax Common, a “public good”; that’s selfish but understandable. However, these developments would negatively impact the Common at ground level, casting large shadows, whether long and slim or short and fat. The Venturi effect from the three towers would increase wind speed and turbulence along Robie and Quinpool and across the Common, reducing our enjoyment of the skating oval and playing fields, as well as neighbourhood sidewalks, gardens and parks.

We strongly support smart mixed-use development on these two properties. Development will happen there. But such developments can and should be better in every way: especially urban, social and environmental. Across Canada and beyond, there are countless examples of much higher quality, richness and thoughtfulness — such as the new Halifax Central Library.

This location deserves better. The public deserves better. Therefore, we strongly urge HRM to apply the existing statutes to these two properties, without negotiating exceptional development agreements.

**Submitted by Andrea Arbic, Peggy Cameron, Kathy Moggridge, Steve Parcell and J. Grant Wanzel**

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