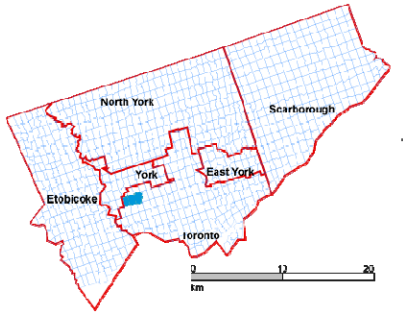
To: **Dr. Zhixi Cecilia Zhuang**, Planning Director
Date: Monday, December 6th, 2010
Re: **Planning Direction for North Junction District**

From: Christopher Evan Jones
500325518 – PLG320

Preamble

Situated in the north-west corner of the old City of Toronto *(Image 1)*, The Junction once was a railway hub for the food packaging industry. Growing linearly along the a major route out of town, Dundas West, this historical working-class neighbourhood suffered from three decades of shifting economics as industry scaled back operations or closed entirely – leaving brownfields in its wake. While Dundas defines an historical attractiveness that has drawn a new class of citizens – rejuvenating the surrounding homes and businesses and increased education, income and mill rates – little benefit from this extended north of the railway lands. Previous attempts to redevelop these lands left the neighbourhood disjointed – reflecting values better suited for suburban living than the heavily transit-connected community that it is.

Image 1



Bridging the Edge

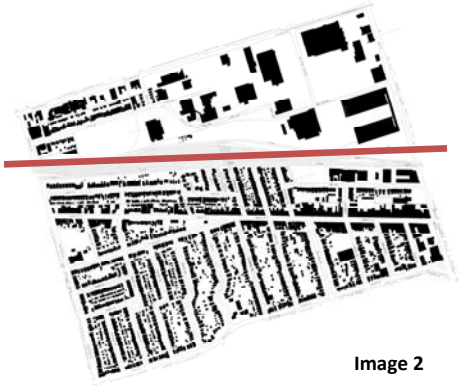


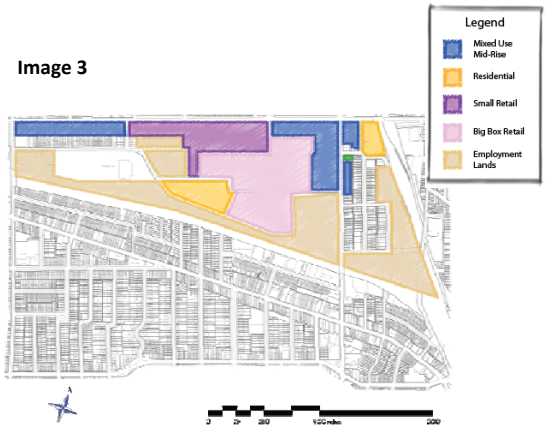
Image 2

The railway lands – a hard edge crossing the neighbourhood *(Image 2)* – divides this previous work-live community to the north and south. While strong community action revitalized the south; automobile-centric big-box retailers and infill housing devoid of pedestrian legibility and continuity dominate the north. Development of the brownlands – with increased densities from mixed-use, mid-rise development and greater north-south connectivity – will draw more pedestrian traffic and small retail to the district and

provide a cohesive transit-oriented nodes and open up existing but underutilized green spaces with the potential of designating others – benefiting both sides of the barrier.

Rationale

Image 3



Lynch states that by carrying through character along paths with visible end-points scaled not to isolate or overbear[1], aids in developing a district that is recognizable and comfortable for its users. St. Clair's vast, open parking lots with little recognisable character increases the perceived walking time and without useful paths, nodes are difficult to cultivate and maintain[2]. Three major nodes within the northern district fail to maintain the critical flow to become a viable, even though they possess favourable elements, such as retail, transit and recreational space[3]. Increasing densities *(Image 3)* along major roads provides lifeblood to form public squares or open green space. As pedestrian density increases, so can the viability of small commercial retailers and restaurants, feeding off nodes as places to collect or reflect[4]. Alexander argues the placement of street windows and sidewalk cafes elevate effective use of avenues and break the monotony of the street for residents and commuters[5]. Buildings should hug the avenue and interact with the streetscape to provide an adequate thoroughfare, a concept big-box retailers currently violate.

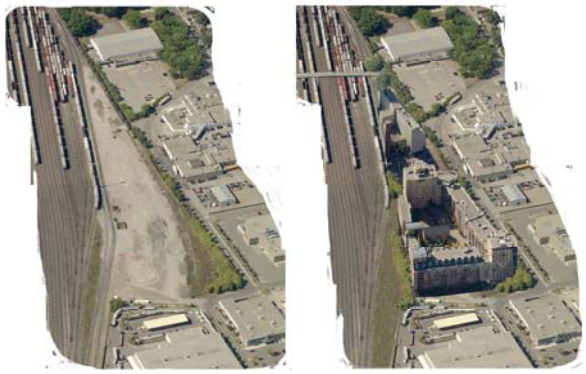


Image 4

Whyte defines open space as requirements for human interaction and establishing a vibrant community. With little ability nor comfort to congregate and participate, these sparse and underutilized nodes draw little attention,

limiting exposure and safety[6]. Light penetration can be preserved by following the step-backed design defined within the Avenue and Mid-Rises[7] guideline and tree-lined streets provides waypoints for travel, alternating shade and seat places for resting or observing. While currently designated as employment lands *(Image 4)*, mixed-income housing on the empty lot near Runnymede Park in tandem with a north-south link over the railway lands will redefine the node and spawn a symbiotic relationship with residence, retail, recreation and transit.

Precedent

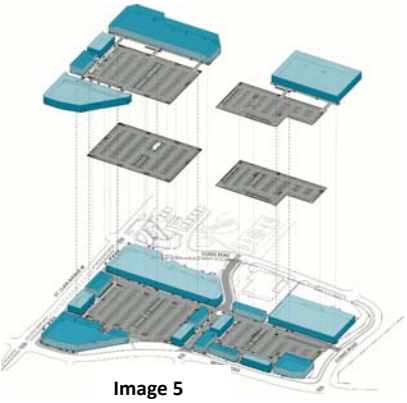


Image 5

While not ideal, Trinity Development plans to bring higher density retail north of the area[8] – with mixed big-box and street-fronting retail and stacked rear parking *(Image 5)* – it shows increased interest in creating potential pedestrian visibility in large tracts of brownfield lands. The bike and pedestrian bridge planned for Fort York[9] with an unique configuration to span two sets of rails, including one slated electrification *(Image 6)* – demonstrates how connectivity can change a neighbourhood as a developer is now planning to add new condominiums directly adjacent[10]. And even with TransitCity's uncertain future, increased development and density can justify a new regional transit node via the MoveOntario 2020 plan on the 15-year conceptual Crosstown route[11].

Image 6

The Toronto Official Plan, in sections 3.1.1, 3.1.2 and 3.2.1 recommends the following: A neighbourhood that offers a wide variety of housing types; A positive and lively environment at transit-supportive densities; Emphasize pedestrian and cycling connections; Disallow big-box frontage on large avenues; and Enhance parkland and community services as a part of redevelopment – the aim of this imitative[12].

Impacts

Jacob states how we observe our urban environment also defines how we interact with it[13]. With low connectivity, underutilized nodes, limits to pedestrian movement and insufficient density, the northern section of The Junction fails to find uniformity and intrigue with its neighbours. The economic transformation over the past decade provides an opportunity to rebuild what was once a vibrant work-live community. By implementing the Avenue and Mid-rises plan, coordinated with the St. Clair Weston draft concept with the new connections and mixed housing, we're not only reconnecting a lost section of The Junction neighbourhood, we can potentially duplicate its southern half's success. Increased density and transit usage will justify improvements to the St. Clair LRT and provide a new destination with economic, recreational and employment opportunities for the surrounding neighbourhoods – meeting the goal of the city to maintain a sustainable, viable and inviting community while maintaining our budget's bottom line.

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[1] Lynch, K. (1960). *The Image of a City*. The MIT Press. Cambridge. 50-51.
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[3] Lynch, K. (1960). *The Image of a City*. The MIT Press. Cambridge. 84.
[4] Alexander, C. (1977). *A Pattern Language: Towns, Buildings, Construction*. Oxford University Press. Patterns 88, 123, 160.
[5] Alexander, C. (1977). *A Pattern Language: Towns, Buildings, Construction*. Oxford University Press. Patterns 88, 100, 164.
[6] Whyte, W. H. (1980). *The Social Life of Small Urban Spaces*. Project for Public Spaces. New York. 108.
[7] Brooke Mcllroy Planning & Urban Design/Pace Architects, et al. (2010, May) *Avenues and Mid-Rise Building Study*.
[8] Bryne, G. (2008) *30 Weston Road – Zoning By-law Amendment and Site Plan.* City of Toronto.
[9] Stantec, MonigomerySisam (2009) *Fort York Pedestrian and Cycle Bridge: Class Environmental Assessment Study*. City of Toronto. Retrieved from http://www.toronto.ca/involved/projects/ftyork_bridge/pdf/2009-09-16_pic_ii_presentation_revised_photos.pdf
[10] Markowiak, J. (2010) *30 Ordnance Street - Rezoning Application*. City of Toronto.
[11] Metrolinx (2008, November) *The Big Move: Transforming Transportation in the Greater Toronto and Hamilton Area*. Greater Toronto Transportation Authority. 106.
[12] Wright, G. (2002, 2009) Toronto Official Plan. Toronto. 3.1-3.34.
[13] Jacobs, A. B. (1985) *Looking at Cities*, Harvard University Press. Cambridge. 11, 81. From Robinson (2010) Learning to See: Systematic Approaches to Neighbourhood Analysis. Ryerson University.

Images: **(1)** Damba, N. (2010) Ryerson University Library; **(2, 3: Base Map)**: City of Toronto (2007) Property Maps; **(4: Base Image)** Microsoft, NAVTEQ (2010) Retrieved from bing.ca; **(5)** Trinity Development Group (2010) Retrieved from http://www.trinity-group.com/?q=node/432; **(6)** Stantec, MonigomerySisam (2009) *Fort York Pedestrian and Cycle Bridge: Class Environmental Assessment Study*. City of Toronto;