**Zoning By-law**

**Review of Minimum Parking Requirements**

**Discussion Paper #2: Draft Recommendations**

**Input from the Civic Hospital Neighbourhood Association (CHNA)**

Context

The Civic Hospital Neighbourhood Association (CHNA) is generally supportive of the majority of the recommendation in this paper.

We have been advocating for better transit, a seamless cycling infrastructure and pedestrian-friendly streets for many years. For CHNA, policies that encourage residents of the City of Ottawa to leave their cars at home, and walk, cycle or bus to get to their destinations are long overdue. And we have also been calling for an Area-Wide Traffic Management Study for our community as a way to investigate and mitigate the increasingly negative impact of cut-through traffic on our residential streets.

Parking has long been an issue for CHNA residents. Some of our ongoing parking issues include:

* The streets near the Civic Hospital Campus (including Parkdale / Ruskin / Melrose / Holland / Carling and streets to the north and east of the hospital such as Sherwood and Fairmont) allow parking at various times, and are in constant use by hospital staff, patients and visitors, as well as by patients and visitors to other medical and institutional buildings in the area. Hospital visitors have been known to ignore rules around blocked streets to access parking on our residential streets. Residents also complain of blocked driveways and report that visitors to their homes have to park long distances because the on-street parking is fully utilized.
* The streets in the eastern district of our neighbourhood (Railway, Champagne, Young, etc. in Little Italy) are being used more frequently by patrons of Preston Street restaurants and businesses. In addition, the new high-rise condominiums on Champagne are bringing more parked cars to this area and the use of these small streets for parking is expected to increase as development continues in the Preston & Carling district.
* Parking for hospital staff also reaches out to other areas of our neighbourhood. Much to the chagrin of residents, a neighbourhood park, Ruskin Park, was paved over some time ago to provide more parking for the Civic Hospital. The hospital has also spread out into parking lots throughout the community (Irving and Carling; Champagne and Carling), creating more traffic and resulting in the Hospital Shuttle Bus sometimes using residential streets to transport staff to and from the hospital.

So, while we are generally supportive of many of the recommendations, we are concerned that certain of them have the potential to add to the problems we encounter in our neighbourhood. Therefore, our comments on these Draft Recommendations are provided under the backdrop of CHNA’s experiences with parking in our neighbourhood.

Detailed Comments:

**Draft Recommendations and the Transportation Master Plan**

Page 3:

CHNA generally agrees with the directions and policies guiding the recommendations, but questions whether the 6th goal is achievable. As stated, this goal reads: “*ensuring that walking, cycling and transit are residents’ first choices for transportation*…”

While this is a laudable goal, it is not achievable, as not all residents of the city will or can walk, cycle or take transit. In our experience, the City sets objectives but does not put in place the resources to achieve the objectives. For example, the city must dedicate more resources to encouraging residents to use public transit. And, for CHNA, this also means improving service in the downtown core.

For some time, CHNA has been decrying the decline in transit service in downtown Ottawa. For example, transit service from our community to local shopping districts (Glebe and Wellington West, for example) has been deteriorating. The only bus that currently offers service from our community to these two shopping districts is the #6 bus, which operates only at rush hour at ½ hour intervals. Taking the O-Train and/or transferring to get to these locations (which are not far from our neighbourhood) are a barrier to residents who might otherwise use public transit to shop.

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CHNA agrees that there “*could be a lot of demand for housing in inner ward neighbourhoods, but without the need for parking*”. Indeed, we made this comment in our input to the Preston-Carling Secondary Plan. Intensification at the Preston-Carling transit node was encouraged/approved by the city because of its proximity to transit. However, the city also approved parking requirements that were much higher than CHNA felt were warranted given the proximity to transit. The city should encourage developers to emphasize the desirability and convenience of using transit when marketing condominiums near transit nodes.

Being a downtown neighbourhood, CHNA agrees that supporting residents and customers “who choose not to drive” and businesses “that seek to serve foot traffic” are important ingredients to enhancing the liveability of downtown communities and retaining a vibrant downtown core. However, the residents of our neighbourhood currently have a long journey by foot to buy groceries.

We are witnessing high-density residential development in or near our local neighbourhood, but there are few local shops and services that provide the essentials of life to the many new residents to our community, such as fresh foods and drug stores. Consequently, there is also an increase in vehicle traffic from residents of the new condominiums who must get into their cars to drive to these stores. And we have been frustrated by the city’s unwillingness to put in place enticements or policies to encourage developers to include space for shops and services in their site plans.

Besides a dearth of shopping choices in our neighbourhood, the Preston-Carling Public Realm and Mobility Plan also noted that: “…*urban dwellers are required to travel outside of their neighbourhoods to access recreational facilities and parkland.*” As CHNA commented at the time, “*this seems counterintuitive to the pedestrian, cycling and transit-oriented urban public realm that the City identifies as an objective of intensification*.”

It is our sincere hope that easing the parking requirements will result in an increase in local shops and services that will meet the needs of the long-time and new residents of our neighbourhood and reduce our dependence on cars.

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Figure 3 at the top of Page 5 is an excellent illustration of the source of the traffic downtown neighbourhoods increasingly experience. Drive-through traffic, from suburban communities such as Riverside South, speeds down our streets as commuters travel alone in their cars to and from work. CHNA streets such as Bayswater, Fairmont, Holland, Parkdale and Sherwood are overrun with suburban cars.

From CHNA’s perspective, much of the traffic we currently experience (in particular during the morning and evening rush hour) is not from downtown residents but from suburban commuters.

And while a policy that reduces parking and car usage in the downtown will be heartily supported by CHNA, it is only a small part of the overall solution to Ottawa’s growing traffic problem – one that is negatively affecting our downtown residential neighbourhoods.

CHNA encourages the city to articulate an integrated vision for all of the city of Ottawa that moves it away from its current car-centric culture. Why not lower parking minimums in suburban communities? Why not encourage main streets in suburban communities to satisfy most of residents’ shopping needs? Look at what other cities have done to protect their urban residential neighbourhoods**.**

**Proposed Approaches to Minimum Parking Rates, By Area**

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**2. Area Y (Mainstreets and certain Mixed-use Centres within the Inner Urban Area)**

CHNA understands the link between reducing required parking for smaller scale development and the positive impact it might have on creating more “pedestrian focused” streets. We note that this approach would be used for “Lands fronting on …Carling Avenue” as well as the ‘Mixed-Use Centre at Preston Street and Carling Avenue south of the Queensway.”

In its current configuration, Carling Avenue could never be considered “pedestrian focused”. It will only be considered as such when the pedestrian sidewalk is more inviting and there are separate, safe cycling lanes on this arterial main street.

Any small-scale businesses along Carling Avenue near the Civic Hospital will find little on-street parking for customers, because of the many “no parking” areas on residential streets and adjacent parking will likely be taken by hospital staff, patients and visitors. Therefore, these businesses will only succeed if they focus on attracting walk-in customers from the neighbourhood and/or courageous cycling customers from farther afield (who risk life and limb as they cycle on Carling Avenue!!)

In previous interactions with the city on other files, city transportation officials informed CHNA that parking is allowed on Carling Avenue. There is no consensus among neighbourhood residents around the desirability of parking on Carling Avenue given the current configuration of the street (speeding buses and cars immediately adjacent to pedestrians). But the street design for Carling Avenue envisioned in the Preston-Carling Public Realm and Mobility includes a separated or raised cycling lane and a safe pedestrian sidewalk well away from the traffic. For small businesses to succeed on Carling Avenue, a new street design is an essential ingredient and will go a long way to re-energizing Carling as a main street rather than an arterial.

**3) Area Z (Near selected rapid-transit stations)**

CHNA has long been pushing to reduce parking requirements for development in the Preston-Carling District. To CHNA, it seemed illogical to plan development at transit stations to encourage residents to use transit, while at the same time, authorizing parking at the same rates as in other areas of the city. As noted in previous sections of this submission, the city should encourage developers to market condominiums near transit nodes (such as Preston-Carling) by emphasizing the desirability of using transit. Car-sharing services such as Virtucars could also be part of the solution for residents who need occasional access to a vehicle.

**4) Near rapid-transit stations outside of Areas X, Y and Z**

While not the subject of this Zoning By-law, CHNA questions why these rapid-transit stations serve low-density suburban residential with no plans to change to higher density, while downtown rapid-transit stations are being intensified or, in some residents’ opinions, over-intensified.

CHNA suggests that the 25-50% is a good start but the city must be more ambitious in reducing parking rates for non-residential land uses near these rapid-transit stations, and start planning for higher density near these rapid-transit stations with lower parking minimums (75-100%), closer to the standards for downtown communities.

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**5. Remaining Areas**

**Residential uses in the Inner Urban Area (Area X)**

**2) No change to minimum parking rates for Mid-rise Apartment Dwellings or High-rise Apartment Dwellings**

CHNA understands the need to continue requiring parking at the same rate as the current Zoning By-law and is encouraged that urban form and urban design objectives can be achieved through requirements such as underground parking garages. CHNA would encourage the city to push developers to look for opportunities to include car-sharing services as a norm in mid and high-rise buildings, with the objective of reducing the number of cars in the inner urban area.

**3) No increase to the current exemption from visitor parking requirements**

CHNA is pleased that visitor parking will not be reduced in buildings containing in excess of 12 dwelling units, as this is a source of on-street parking for both small scale and large scale development.

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**4) Reduce the visitor parking rate to one per twelve dwelling units.**

CHNA agrees that consistency with respect to visitor parking spaces in the inner Urban Area is important.

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**Non-residential Uses in Area Y (Selected Mainstreets and Mixed Use Centres)**

**(Sections 1-3)**

CHNA cautions the city that these exemptions will only work for Carling Avenue if the street is reconfigured as per our comments on Area Y (Mainstreets and certain Mixed-use Centres within the Inner Urban Area), found on Page 3 of this submission.

**2) Retail Food Stores of 1000 m2 or less are exempt from minimum parking requirements**

CHNA has seen grocery stores that supported our residents leave the area. Preston Street, Booth Street and Westgate all have lost grocery stores over the years. This situation has been a major concern for CHNA and we have been unsuccessfully lobbying the city for help on this issue. The scale of the building to support a viable grocery store has often been suggested as an impediment. We feel that this recommendation is a good start, but we also suggest that the City go further. We would like the city to remove any barriers to grocers coming into our area. A size of 1,500 m2 without parking may be enough of a reduction in limits to entice a medium-sized grocer such as a Farmboy to the area. The 1,000 m2 limit might discourage most grocers from investing.

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**Near Rapid-Transit Stations**

CHNA supports the approach to parking near transit stations in which “*no minimum parking requirements would apply”.*  Within the Preston-Carling transit district, a high-rise student residence that does not offer resident parking spaces, is under construction. CHNA will be monitoring the success of this venture with interest and will be assessing the impact this building has on parking in the vicinity. Once again, car-sharing services can be an important component to reducing parking requirements near transit stations.

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**Use of parking spaces by off-site users**

CHNA agrees with this approach.

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**Bicycle Parking**

CHNA looks forward to participating in the study on bicycle parking.

**Car-sharing services**

CHNA concurs that extending permission for car-sharing services would help ease issues related to both parking and traffic across the city.

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**On-street parking, including time limits, enforcement, pricing and permits**

On-street parking is a major headache for CHNA. We support better enforcement and encourage the city to conduct a study that will holistically study all aspects of on-street parking.

CHNA questions the logic used to justify reducing the 3-hour parking limit. For example, whenever a restaurant patron leaves a restaurant (after 60 minutes, 90 minutes or 2 hours), the parking space is vacated, regardless of the posted limit…. and less than 3 hours of parking might be an issue for people who are at longer medical appointments or doing business, for example.

There is no question that reduced parking limits on city streets encourages transit use. But CHNA would argue that sometimes the 3-hour parking limit discourages car traffic and encourages residents to use transit. If it is difficult to find a parking space, why bother taking your car?

Parking limits are a difficult balance to attain. Therefore, CHNA advises the city to conduct a study that will holistically analyze all aspects of the current on-street parking rules in the city with the overall objective to discourage car usage as much as possible.

And, as always, CHNA continues to strongly advocate for enforcement of existing parking rules.

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