**Coach Houses**

**Zoning By-law and Official Plan Amendment Proposal Summary**

**File Number: D02-02-15-0021 & D01-01-15-0002**

Comments from the Civic Hospital Neighbourhood Association (CHNA)

The Civic Hospital Neighbourhood Association is pleased to once again have the opportunity to comment on the proposed Coach House Amendments. CHNA is on record as supporting intensification in the downtown core and generally supports this approach to “gentle” intensification.

We believe that all parties to the development of new policies must apply extra rigor to these processes to ensure that these new policies accomplish their goals and do not inadvertently introduce unintended, negative impacts on communities and citizens.

Our approach to reviewing this particular document was to ask questions so we non-urban planners can better understand the rationale behind some of the amendments.

We have all heard the saying “there is no such thing as a stupid question”. We doubt this document is an illustration of this adage. We therefore beg your indulgence.

The following is a summary of our comments and questions. We would be happy to meet with representatives of the city’s planning department to discuss these questions if this is a more efficient way of dealing with them.

**Details of Proposed Official Plan and Zoning Bylaw Amendments** *(general comments):*

These new proposed amendments are required to implement changes to Section 16 of the Planning Act, and are, in essence, charting new territory. CHNA strongly suggests that the City strike a temporary, joint City of Ottawa / FCA Committee or Working Group to review the next to final draft of the Amendments to tease out any potential loopholes or pitfalls that could be exploited, resulting in unintended adverse impacts on existing city neighbourhoods.

*Would the City be open to such a Committee?*

Rules or guidelines around “character” and “streetscape” are applied to Infill.

*CHNA wonders if the City will be specifically referencing similar rules / guidelines in these Amendments?*

CHNA would like more specifics on how the city is intending to protect the urban canopy from damage with the construction of Coach Houses. Many homeowners have large trees at the margins of their properties and the health of these trees could be compromised by construction of Coach Houses adjacent to their properties.

*Has the city considered regulations to protect the urban canopy from unintended damage?*

Downtown neighbourhoods require special consideration. The lots are frequently irregular sizes and shapes. CHNA can envision situations where the Coach Houses are placed closer to an adjacent primary residence than the primary residence with which the Coach House is to be attached. For example, a Coach House could be situated at the rear of a long back yard, closer to the main house of an adjoining property. In another example, one of our CHNA residents lives in a property that abuts the backyards of 7 neighbours. Under the proposed recommendations, six of these 7 residences could accommodate Coach Houses that would abut this property.

*Has the city looked at these kinds of situations, in particular in downtown districts such as the Civic Hospital neighbourhood? Has the city considered specific regulations around Coach House placement so that the Coach Houses are always in closer proximity to the primary residence than the primary residences of adjoining properties?*

**Official Plan Amendment Summary** *(specific comments)***:**

*Servicing from the existing building*: There are existing secondary buildings on lots in some downtown neighbourhoods (small commercial garages and body shops) in which the service connections such as electricity are provided directly and likely billed separately to the secondary structure.

*How will this policy deal with situations in which a property owner would like to turn this secondary structure into separate housing? Will this be grandfathered? Will the existing services have to be reconnected with the primary residence?*

Section 3.1

*Townhouse dwellings*: Coach Houses in these buildings are restricted to “Lots with frontage on a public street and access by a travelled rear lane”.

*Is crowding a concern? Has the city created visual depictions of a row of Coach Houses aligned with townhouse dwellings?*

*Committee of Adjustment approval for 2-storey coach houses on lots smaller than 0.8 hectares*: CHNA’s experience with the CoA is that is that the vast majority of variances, etc. are approved, and that a CoA process is merely a formality. Therefore, it is imperative that the Committee of Adjustment be given specific and appropriate guidance as to zoning variances that can and should be permitted and those that should not. The City must not only specify what the Coach House initiative is designed to achieve but also specify variances that should be carefully examined or instances when Coach Houses are inappropriate, to ensure that the CoA is well positioned to assess any request against these criteria.

*Has the city considered any specific requirements for approval of 2-storey Coach houses on lots smaller than 0.8 hectares to assist the CoA?*

**Table 2: Proposed Amendments to the Zoning By-law**

*Permitted projections*:

 *Would the permitted projections be those listed in Section 64?*

*Where Permitted:*

Water and wastewater services are to be provided from the primary dwelling.

*Are hydro, natural gas & oil treated the same?*

In a lot with a rear yard less than 5 meters, a Coach House can be on or within 1 metre of the rear property line.

*Has the city studied the impact of this proposal? Are their visuals available so we can assess the potential impact?*

*Maximum height*: The recommendation is that a Coach Houses should not exceed the building height of the existing primary dwelling. CHNA is of the opinion that newly built Coach Houses in the downtown core should be no more than 1-1.5 storeys as the impact of an increased number of 2-storey dwellings in older residential neighbourhoods would reduce the already low levels of sunlight in some neighbourhoods affecting the already stressed urban greenery. In our opinion, 2-storey Coach Houses should only be permitted in accessory structures in place as of December 31, 2015.

Setbacks:

*Why is the Coach House wall setback of 1 metre along a rear yard or interior yard a maximum? Why is it not a minimum?*

*Transparent windows*: There are references to transparent windows in the document, in relation to the minimum 4-metre setback “where transparent windows are proposed”. With new glass technology, “smart” or “switchable” glass can be altered from translucent to transparent. Therefore, the language should be tightened up to prohibit any window openings – transparent or otherwise. Indeed, any window opening can be altered post construction to add transparent glass, contravening the privacy intent of not allowing windows within the 1 metre setback.

*Will non-transparent windows will be allowed in the 1-metre setback? Would a smart glass installation within the 1 metre setback be a privacy concern and a potential loophole? Should the language be tightened up in this area?*

*Parking Yards & Driveways / Parking:* While one part of the document indicates that any existing landscaped area cannot be paved (Parking), in another area (Parking Yards and Driveways), “a new driveway may only be created in a rear yard that did not contain a driveway prior to a Coach House being established” thereby potentially paving an existing landscaped area.

*Are these two amendments consistent?*

*Grandfathering clause*: There are some very large existing accessory structures in the downtown core that are well above the maximum footprint of 95m2. Indeed, there are some structures that appear to be as large, if not larger than the primary residence.

 *How does the city envision that these structures would be converted?*

*Planned unit development*:

 *Not being familiar with the intricacies of urban planning, what, if any, are the implications of a Coach House not being considered a planned unit development?*

CHNA looks forward to responses to our concerns and questions?

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 Civic Hospital Neighbourhood Association

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