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Accessibility Assessment of the Development of 4050 Yonge St.

1. Sustainable and Accessible Development: Live, Work, Play Philosophy

This proposed upscale residential and hotel building development with a retail podium has the potential to address several City of Toronto development and quality of life policies and plans, including the City Multi-Year Accessibility Plan and the City Seniors Strategy.

Within the development catchment of 4050 Yonge St. there is no similar opportunity to live in a residential building that embodies the “Live, Work, Play” philosophy. The proposed 4050 Yonge St. epitomizes what a live-work-play community is – namely a development that has a variety of housing options, is close to local companies where members of the community can work and provides recreational outlets for eating and entertainment and access to transit.

The addition of a residential condominium, hotel and conference facility located within the existing residential and business community located nearby the York Mills Centre should be considered as an attractive development that can further contribute to the implementation of this sustainable design philosophy, rather than as a substantial change in land use.

1.1 People with Disabilities Living within the Community

People with a range of disabilities often seek out residential options that enable them to live and work within the same building or same community, alternatively, to live in a building that provides direct accessible access to the transit system. The development of built environments that address the access, use and safety concerns of people with disabilities, ultimately result in facilities that are more attractive for use by people in general.

1.2 Seniors

Seniors, through no fault of their own, also become part of the community of ‘vulnerable road users’. Seniors even while remaining active and vibrant, nevertheless eventually become people who walk a little slower, are a little less stable of foot with less stamina, strength and agility, who don’t see quite as well and have more trouble hearing than they used to. Nevertheless, they are entitled to the same access and experiential use of City services, including access to transit services.

The Communities of ‘Hoggs Hollow’, (as well as the nearby communities of Bedford Park, Bridle Path, York Mills, St. Andrew’s etc.) represent some of Toronto’s most affluent neighbourhoods characterized by large properties and family homes. However, it is inevitable that many of

these homeowners will age and become part of the “Silver Tsunami” sweeping across Canada. Quite often, as people age and no longer wish to have a large home, they still wish to remain in their neighbourhoods, with the quality of lifestyle they have become accustomed to.

The development at 4050 Yonge St. will enable this particular cohort of residents currently living within the development area, to have a residential option within their existing community. If the TTC station is integrated within the facility, it makes the building residences and service even more attractive to such users, as they also have direct and safe access to a transit system that can take them within their community and beyond.

2. Integration of the TTC Station Within 4050 Yonge St. & City Policies

Although the City is developing Senior Safety Zones as part of the Vision Zero Road Safety Plan, requiring seniors and other vulnerable road users such as people with a range of disabilities (e.g. mobility, vision, cognitive, etc.) to cross an exceptionally busy intersection to access transit services via the station at the York Mills Centre, while ‘able bodied’ ambulatory persons are able to make use of a quicker more direct route to the same transit services, is not an equitable, safe or dignified situation. So, while technically the York Mills station is ‘accessible’ to all users, it is not by an equitably experiential manner. Therefore, both Seniors and people with a full range of disabilities would benefit from having a fully accessible transit station integrated into the development planned for 4050 Yonge St., whether they live there, work there, or are using hotel facilities. Furthermore, having a fully accessible station at 4050 Yonge St. enables all residents or visitors to the building, not just people who are ambulatory, to access the York Mills Centre without needing to cross the busy street.

All communities have begun re-assessing zoning bylaws as part of addressing sustainability and providing ease of access to transit as a means of curbing emissions and improving air quality for the entire community. This development provides an opportunity through the planning approvals process to augment and improve municipal assets that address the needs of not only the entire community, but also the specific needs of vulnerable users such seniors and people with a range of disabilities, who are much more reliant on public transit. Increasing density and accessibility of community assets such as transit, as part of developments such as proposed at 4050 Yonge St., addresses the community goals of increasing residential options for seniors within their own community, creating easy, safe and dignified access to transit for vulnerable users such as seniors and people with disabilities, all while creating a more sustainable community.

Addressing the discrimination caused by built environment barriers within the TTC stations can in this circumstance therefore be addressed by the City through collaborating with the private sector. A unique opportunity has presented itself for the development and integration of new and accessible station infrastructure within new developments being undertaken by the private sector. This should be viewed by the City as a particularly attractive opportunity as there are no current plans by the City to address the inequitable access to transit services faced by the most vulnerable users.

2.1 City of Toronto Multi-Year Accessibility Plan

“The City’s Multi-Year Accessibility Plan (MYAP) 2020-2024, adopted by the Toronto Accessibility Advisory Committee on November 1, 2019 and Toronto City Council on December 17, 2019, outlines outcomes and initiatives that reaffirm the City of Toronto’s commitment to an accessible city and to building an equitable and inclusive society that values the contributions of people with disabilities.”

The City’s MYAP, includes a stated goal to foster a culture of equity and inclusion, including challenging assumptions and biases when delivering City services; and identifying and addressing discriminatory systems and processes. This includes ensuring the City provides services to everyone in a manner that respects individuals’ dignity, diversity and abilities. The City will, “Ensure people with disabilities can access and benefit from the same goods, services and facilities in an equitable way as others.”

As the City recognizes that the built environment barriers are a form a discrimination, and is committed to increasing the accessibility of public spaces, it is imperative that the City and its agencies (i.e. TTC) continue to prioritize and retrofit existing built environment barriers at facilities under its management and continue to implement accessibility improvements as part of its Capital programs.

2.2 TTC Multi – Year Accessibility Plan

In order to comply with their obligations under the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA), as a ‘large organization’, the Toronto Transit Commission (TTC) has developed and updated their Multi-Year Accessibility Plan. The latest Accessibility Plan covers 2019-2023. This most recent plan has as several key objectives: guide system-wide accessibility improvements over the next five years, and to go beyond minimum requirements of both the AODA and the Ontario Building Code as it makes upgrades.

By 2018, seven additional stations were made accessible: (Lawrence West, Ossington, St Clair West, Woodbine, Coxwell, and St Patrick) with accessible entrances added at Queen’s Park and Sheppard-Yonge. Meaning that while 45 of 75 stations are accessible to people using wheeled mobility devices. However, there remains approximately 30 that are not, making the goal to ultimately to have all remaining stations be accessible by 2025 an ambitious goal at this time.

2.2.1 York Mills Station - Existing conditions

While the York Mills station is currently identified as accessible by the TTC, not all platforms are accessible to all users from the TTC station at York Mills and Yonge St. For people such as seniors and people with disabilities who are unable to navigate stairs and escalators, they are required to access the station via the York Mills Centre.

Depending on where people are coming from, this may involve crossing the exceptionally busy Yonge St. intersection to get to the York Mills Centre. Therefore, people who are the most vulnerable users (i.e., seniors and people with a range of disabilities), are required to undertake a more arduous journey that ambulatory users are not. As a result, accessing and using TTC service are currently not accessible to all users via the same experiential routes and via a route of equitable ease of access and safety.

2.3 City of Toronto Seniors Strategy, V2.0

The City via its Seniors Strategy has begun to work to address the question of, “How do we [The City] better support seniors to live active and independent lives in their neighbourhoods, communities and homes? Can we make city services for seniors easier to use and navigate?... What does an age-friendly city look like against the backdrop of a fast moving, ... growing metropolis?”

The Toronto Senior Strategy, similar to the City MYAP articulates that equity, respect, inclusion and quality of life are paramount. Furthermore, the strategy commits to ensuring all seniors have equitable access to City services. The proportion of Toronto’s population over age 65 is currently 15.6%, and is projected to grow to 21.2% by 2041 and to continually increase. Fifty-eight percent (58%) of seniors rely on the TTC to move around the City.

The Toronto City “Council directed the Chief Planner & Executive Director, City Planning to make an explicit acknowledgement of council’s commitment to being an age-friendly city in its new Official Plan when the review process [began] in 2018”. As part of Recommendation 15 of the Seniors Strategy, this means the City will develop new neighbourhood facilities, including those around apartment buildings or housing developments to meet the needs of seniors as appropriate.

As previously indicated, seniors looking to downsize from their large properties and family homes within the ‘Hogg’s Hollow’ and surrounding communities, will be looking for residential opportunities such as that being proposed for 4050 Yonge St., with access to amenities and safe and easy access to transit within one facility.

3. 4050 Yonge St. without Incorporating the Stand-Alone TTC Station

Proceeding with the 4050 Yonge St. development without the integration of the TTC station at York Mills will result in less-than-ideal conditions for the localized community, as well as for the Greater Toronto area.

Communities that embrace the Live Work Play philosophy tend to be greater users of public transit, creating healthier, cleaner and more sustainable communities in which to live for everyone. Without easy seamless access to a transit station integrated into the new developed and faced with the alternative of having to navigate the current inaccessible station with luggage, groceries, etc., people who are residents, staff and hotel guests are more likely to

continue to use private vehicles to access the buildings at 4050 Yonge St. Furthermore, maintaining the aging existing TTC Station will continue to be the financial, operational and maintenance responsibility of the TTC. As there is an 'alternative' accessible route available to access the transit system, and since there continues to be many TTC stations that are not accessible for people using mobility devices whatsoever, this station will not be included in plans for upgrades for the foreseeable future, (particularly as the Covid response has placed an additional financial burden on the City). Consequently, there will remain barriers to the built environment, perpetuating a situation of discrimination against society's most vulnerable users, (i.e., seniors and people with a range of disabilities) who will still be required to cross Yonge St. to access the York Mills station via York Mills Centre.

This is an approach not in keeping with the City of Toronto's stated objective of becoming an accessible city and to building an equitable and inclusive society. Missing the opportunity to integrate the TTC station into the proposed development at 4050 Yonge St. through collaboration with the private sector is a missed opportunity to address what amounts to a discriminatory system, that currently fails to provide services to everyone in a manner that respects individuals' dignity, diversity and abilities in a manner that would enable them to access and benefit from the same services and facilities in an equitable way as others.

4. Conclusion

The development of 4050 Yonge St., combined with the integration of a fully accessible TTC York Mills transit station, addresses many of the City's stated policies for creating a more accessible, livable community for all, including seniors and people with disabilities. The development of an additional type of residential opportunity along with additional work opportunities within an existing Live, Work, Play community addresses sustainability and Green Goals. In addition, the collaboration with a private developer alleviates the City's financial burden and responsibility for the development of a new accessible transit station. This helps the City remove a discriminatory barrier to the built environment, in a way that benefits the entire community, both financially and in a manner that increases independence and dignity of vulnerable users, including people with disabilities and seniors.

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Accessibility Simplified

Reference Documents:

1. Toronto Seniors Strategy 2.0 (<https://www.toronto.ca/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/93cd-CoT-seniors-strategy2.pdf>)
2. City of Toronto Multi-Year Accessibility Plan 2020-2024 (<https://www.toronto.ca/city-government/accessibility-human-rights/accessibility-at-the-city-of-toronto/multi-year-accessibility-plan/>)
3. Toronto Transit Commission (TTC) Multi-Year Accessibility Plan 2019 – 2023 ([https://www.ttc.ca/About the TTC/Commission reports and information/Commission meetings/2019/May 8/Reports/2019-2023 TTC Multi-Year Accessibility Plan Presentation upd.pdf](https://www.ttc.ca/About%20the%20TTC/Commission%20reports%20and%20information/Commission%20meetings/2019/May%208/Reports/2019-2023%20TTC%20Multi-Year%20Accessibility%20Plan%20Presentation%20upd.pdf))