

Westboro-Dominion Planning Study

Discussion Paper #1
April 2019

Please comment by May 31, 2019

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Introduction

With the expected arrival of Stage 1 Light Rail Transit (LRT) in 2019 and Stage 2 in 2025, the neighbourhoods near rapid-transit stations have seen more demand for housing, services and commercial space. This interest has been very evident around the Westboro and Dominion transit stations in Westboro. In the past few years, the City has seen requests for major zoning amendments and development applications to accommodate more intensive development along Scott Street and Richmond Road, as well as in the surrounding neighbourhood.

All this activity has highlighted a need for more clarity in planning direction for the Westboro-Dominion station area in Westboro. Accordingly, Ottawa City Council in [month of 2017] directed Planning staff to undertake a planning study in those areas.

The Westboro-Dominion Planning Study Area

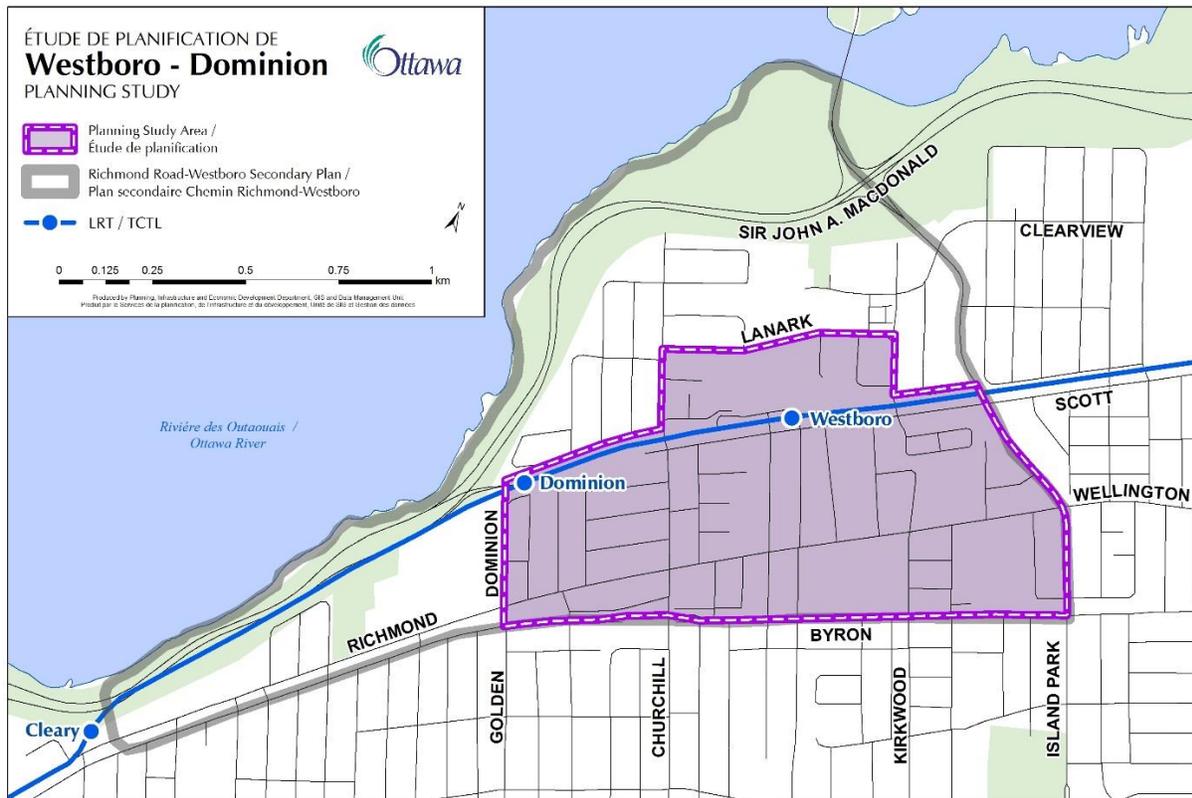
The [Richmond Road-Westboro Secondary Plan](#) was adopted in 2008 to provide planning direction for a large part of Kitchissippi Ward and remains in force today. The Secondary Plan is intended to guide the area's long-term design and development, and addresses land use, urban design, zoning, transportation, existing streetscape conditions, compatibility of new development, and other issues. It is also used to evaluate development proposals.

The Westboro-Dominion Planning Study is not intended to replace or amend the whole Richmond Road-Westboro plan. Rather, it will focus on the southeast quarter of that plan area and address in greater detail those lands that are generally:

- West of Island Park Drive
- North of Byron Avenue
- East of Dominion Street; and
- South of the Transitway and Lanark Avenue.

The study area includes two mixed commercial/residential main streets (Scott Street and Richmond Road), as well as the more transitional Churchill and McRae Avenues. It also includes the adjacent established residential streets, which are generally zoned for low-rise residential development ranging from single family homes to fourplexes. Finally, the large and mostly vacant site at 250 Lanark presents an opportunity for infill or redevelopment that would make the best use of the City's rapid-transit investments. (Figure 1.)

Figure 1: Westboro-Dominion Planning Review area



Planning Issues in the Westboro-Dominion Area

Early research has found a number of questions, issues and concerns for possible consideration through this planning study.

What is the maximum building height that should be considered for buildings on Richmond Road and Scott Street, and under what circumstances could that height be allowed?

A series of recent development applications for high-rise development along Scott Street have raised questions, from residents and developers alike, about just how tall buildings should be on those sites.

The current Secondary Plan generally supports buildings of between four and six storeys on Scott Street and Richmond Road.¹ However, it then goes on to say that greater heights may be

¹ Richmond Road-Westboro Secondary Plan, s.1.3.3.

allowed under certain circumstances. Those circumstances include, among others, cases where the development creates a community focus"....*where the proposal is on a corner lot, or at a gateway location or at a location where there are opportunities to support transit at a transit stop or station;*" subject to also meeting compatibility criteria set out in the Official Plan.

Aside from the question of what exactly constitutes a community focus, most properties along the entire length of Richmond Road and Scott street are either a corner lot and/or support transit stops or stations. Furthermore, the policy does not specify any maximum height in those cases.

As a result, residents and development interests have no way of knowing how big a building might be approved nearby through rezoning.

The question extends not just to height (i.e. how high is the tallest part of the building) but also to massing, setbacks and transitions² to neighbouring low-rise buildings and blocks. More guidance on how high podiums should rise, how far back towers should step back, and other aspects of shaping and distributing a building's massing could benefit all stakeholders.

Should McRae Avenue and Churchill Avenue evolve into Mainstreets?

These north-south streets between Richmond Road and Scott Street are in something of a transition. Churchill has a mix of older, purpose-built commercial buildings and apartments, as well as houses that have been converted to commercial uses. McRae Avenue has a mix of residential and non-residential development, including recent high-density developments at the north end of the street; its development or redevelopment is complicated by the high-voltage transmission corridor running alongside it.

Both of these corridors serve as connections for people moving between Richmond Road and Scott Street and accessing the rapid-transit stations.

The current Secondary Plan supports the gradual redevelopment of Churchill and McRae Avenues for mixed-use buildings, generally in the four- to six-storey range, and encourages residential and employment uses as well as commercial uses on the two streets. However, it stops short of calling for these streets to become Mainstreets, and indeed speaks to "commercial uses that do not affect the viability of Richmond Road and Scott Street traditional mainstreets." The current Plan also provides limited guidance as to the intended character of these important north-south connections. Meanwhile, the current GM (General Mixed-Use) zoning is a somewhat outdated commercial zone that does little to help produce a quality, pedestrian-oriented urban environment.

² Please see Appendix A for a glossary of technical terms used in this paper.

More focused planning guidance around uses, heights and urban design, as well as dealing with the physical challenge of hydro corridors (on McRae) and tight lot fabric (on Churchill) may be in order.

Some Secondary Plan areas, such as the Centretown Secondary Plan and the Scott Street Secondary Plan, have recognized some streets as "secondary mainstreets" that encourage mixed use and pedestrian-oriented design while limiting land uses to those that would not undermine the nearby Mainstreets. Such an approach may be appropriate to consider for McRae and Churchill, or it may be appropriate to recognize Churchill and/or McRae as actual Mainstreets on the same level as e.g. Richmond Road.

How should development occur in the residential interior of the study area?

The current Secondary Plan includes policies for the Richmond Road and Scott Street Traditional Mainstreets, and for commercial streets such as McRae Avenue and Churchill Avenue. However, the existing plan does not deal with the abutting residential streets.

No neighbourhood can be expected to remain completely static; some development and redevelopment is inevitable, especially in an older neighbourhood. In recent years, a number of redevelopments have occurred within the existing zoning or with the help of minor variances or site-specific rezonings. The combination of proximity to rapid transit and to mainstreets like Richmond Road, the age of some buildings, and the demand for a range of housing types has already begun to drive redevelopment in these areas. Detailed planning guidance may be able to direct these energies in a more coherent, predictable and desirable direction. In particular, the large residential lots on some streets offer excellent opportunities for the "missing middle" range of mid-density multi-unit housing that would accommodate growing demand while maintaining a low-rise built form.

A related question is how development permitted on Mainstreets should transition as it meets residential side streets. There may be cases where such extensions are appropriate, and others where the mainstreet environment should be firmly limited to existing commercial lands. This was a matter that was part of the consideration for a recent zoning application at the corner of Richmond Road and Roosevelt Avenue that proposed to extend the Traditional Mainstreet zoning down Roosevelt to allow a six-storey extension of a mixed-use building on the corner.

It may be appropriate to provide some further clarity around when such transitions may be considered.

What urban design standards should apply throughout the study area?

Being next to major transit facilities, the area has for some time attracted higher-density development. But higher density has to come with excellent urban design, in everything from treatment of lands at grade, building design and orientation, and the interface between private lands and the public realm.

Regardless of whether a site is intended for high-rise or low-rise development, whether residential or commercial, there may be a need to consider some area specific direction beyond the general policies in the OP and design directions in existing design guidelines to address some of the specific contextual considerations in the area.

What is the vision for 250 Lanark?

250 Lanark is the site of the Graham Spry building, currently home to Health Canada offices, located in the center of an otherwise largely vacant lot just north of Westboro Station. As such it offers an opportunity for redevelopment or infill that makes the best use of the new rapid-transit infrastructure. However, such development (whenever it occurs) ideally would be guided by a plan that ensures a quality interface with the neighbours, and provides excellent pedestrian and cycling connectivity between the neighbourhood and the transit station.

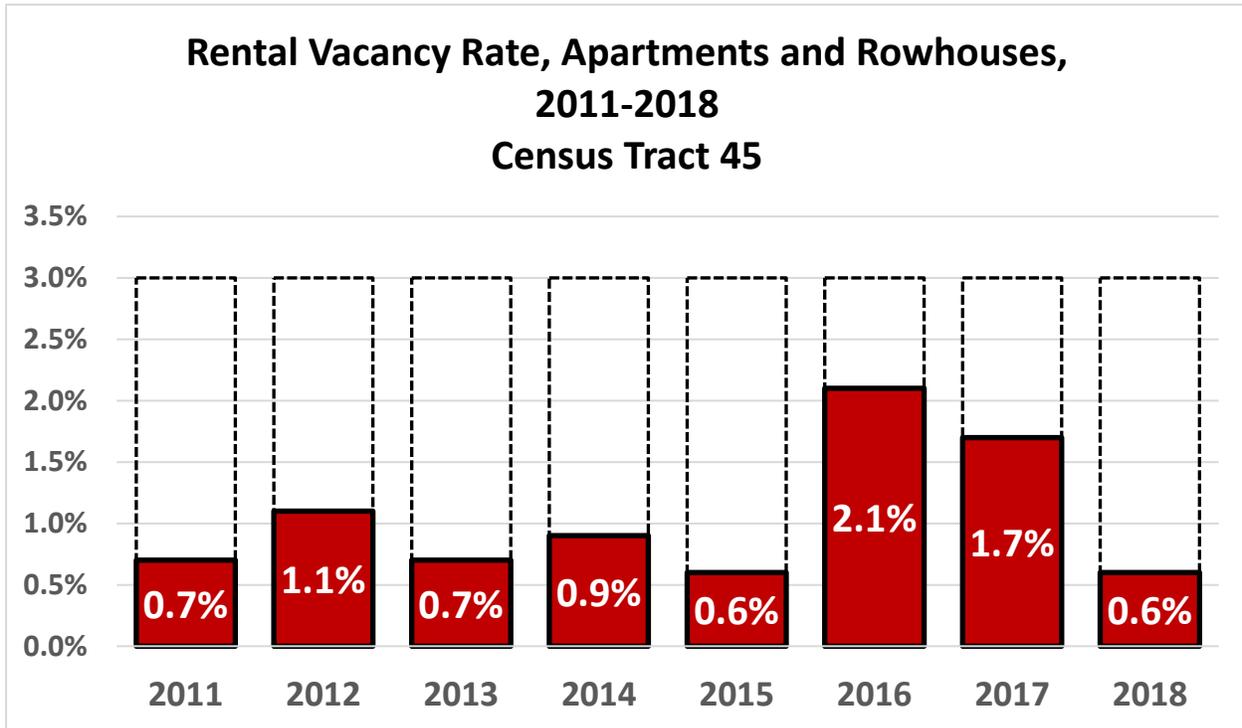
The Westboro Beach Community Association has produced a draft document outlining its preferred vision for 250 Lanark. An excerpt summarizing the main points is included as Appendix B, and can provide a useful starting point for considering specific policies for the site in the Secondary Plan.

How can the City provide the best opportunities for more affordable housing?

The Official Plan encourages a range of housing types suitable to different kinds of households, for renters as well as for homeowners, affordable to different price points. Affordable housing (which in this context includes market-rate housing that is affordable to less affluent households, not just government-subsidized or social housing) is particularly appropriate near rapid-transit stations, since many households are already squeezed by the cost of housing and owning one or more vehicles. Meanwhile, renter households are significantly less likely to drive to work, making the lands around rapid transit a natural location for rental apartments.

In any case, the City-wide need for more rental units is unusually acute in the study area. A healthy vacancy rate is about 3%, but vacancies in Census Tract 45 (where most of the study area is located) have remained below that level for eight years in a row, averaging just 1.1% since 2010. (Figure 2.) This makes it very hard for tenant households to find a suitable place to live.

Figure 2: Rental vacancy rate, Census Tract 045, 2011-2018 (Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation)



The ongoing scarcity of rental housing is driving up rents city-wide, but particularly in the study area. Census data suggest that while long-term tenants enjoy some stability thanks to rent control, newly-vacated units in CT45 have seen rent increases of over 20% in a single year. The City's role in providing housing directly is limited. However, it may be appropriate, when reviewing the planning and zoning framework for the area, to seek opportunities to remove undue obstacles to affordability. Given that, what steps can be taken through this study to help increase the supply of rental housing and affordable units near the Westboro and Dominion LRT stations?

Table 1: Average rent paid by one-year mobility status.

Average gross rent, 2016	City of Ottawa	Census Tract 045
All tenant households	\$1,148	\$1,284
Did not move in the past year	\$1,107	\$1,217
Moved in the past year	\$1,261	\$1,490
"Moving premium", one-year	14%	22%

Source: Statistics Canada, 2016 Census, custom tabulation

Other questions and issues

This paper has identified several matters that could be considered as part of the Secondary Plan review for directions that could be provided to provide greater clarity for development in and around the Westboro and Dominion LRT station areas. This is intended to serve as a departure for further discussion and identification of other possible matters that may be considered through the review. In this regard, we are looking to hear from you and receive your further comments/thoughts.

Please provide comment by **May 31, 2019**. You can send us your thoughts, comments and questions by mail, email or fax.

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Also, be sure to check our project website periodically for updates at:

ottawa.ca/WestboroDominionStudy

Appendix A: Glossary

Some readers may not be familiar with all the terms used in this paper. The following glossary should help!

High-rise building: The City defines "high-rise" as anything ten or more storeys in overall height. However, parts of the building might be considerably lower (for instance, the podium.)

Intensive: In the context of development and buildings, intensive means big and/or tall, with a lot of residents, dwelling units, jobs or floor area. It's a relative term, not an absolute one; we usually refer to "more intensive" or "less intensive" development in comparison to what was there before or what's around it.

Low-rise building: The City of Ottawa defines "low-rise" as anything up to and including four full storeys. It doesn't count basements as storeys, so a low-rise building could have up to five habitable levels, including a semi-basement level. More commonly, because of some limitations in the Building Code, we see buildings with three storeys above grade plus a basement. (The latter are sometimes called "Part 9 buildings," after the section of the Building Code that regulates them.)

Mainstreet: Ottawa's Official Plan uses the term "Mainstreet" to describe certain mixed-use, mid-density streets that are intended to have stores, services, restaurants, offices and other commercial uses along housing in generally low-rise or mid-rise buildings. Mainstreets are more about pedestrians and transit users, and less about moving cars around (although they often provide for on-street parking.) In the Westboro-Dominion plan area, Richmond Road is a fairly established Mainstreet, while Scott Street is intended to become one and designated as such in the Official Plan.

Massing: How the volume of a building is arranged. A squat box that occupies most of the site; a taller slab that occupies part of the site; or a low-rise podium with a very tall, skinny tower might all have the same total floor area, but their massings are different.

Mid-rise building: The City of Ottawa uses "mid-rise" to describe any building that is between five and nine full storeys in height at its highest point.

Missing middle: For reasons of economics as well as planning rules, it is fairly easy to build low-density single-family homes and semi-detached houses; meanwhile, the economies of scale also favour high-rise condo towers. The "missing middle" is the stuff in between: small low-rise apartment buildings that fit in well in established neighbourhoods, are cost-effective to build, and that would suit a wide range of household types and incomes.

Podium: The short, wide part of a tall building, where the lower storeys are located. A podium might be two to four storeys high and cover most of the site; then there might be a tall, slim tower that extends upward from part of the podium. A podium-type building might be very tall but it won't feel very tall to someone next door or on the street because the part they're closest to is not much higher than the surrounding buildings.

Tower: The part of a building that is noticeably taller than the rest of the building. ("Tower" also refers more generally to high-rise buildings or to buildings that are significantly taller than what's around them, but in the context of this study we're generally talking about the tall part of a high-rise building.)

Transition: How one kind of development or built environment gradually changes as it meets a different kind of built environment. We speak of height transitions, where a tall building might have a low-rise podium where the site meets an abutting low-rise neighbourhood. Transitions can also refer to uses, as when a commercial street with stores, restaurants etc. meets a residential side street by having commercial facades wrap around the corner (or not.) Transition might refer to how things change along the street, or it can refer to how one kind of development meets a different kind of development on the lot behind it.

Appendix B: Excerpt from Westboro Beach Community Association vision for 250 Lanark

In February 2019, the Westboro Beach Community Association (WCBA) provided a draft document outlining its preferred vision for the eventual redevelopment of the 250 Lanark site. As such, it is a useful starting point for further discussion. A summary excerpted from that document is reproduced below.

Elements of WBCA's Vision for "250 Lanark" include:

- Recognition of this Vision Statement in the City of Ottawa's formal planning documentation, including the Westboro-Dominion planning study to be done in Spring 2019, prior to any pre-development decisions that could affect the future development and use of the site.
- Inclusion of mixed uses – potentially mixed and affordable residential, commercial, social service facilities, and health and recreation opportunities. This could feature for example a recreation center and outdoor sports facilities, a seniors' residence, a health services center, and small employment nodes.
- Respect for the predominant character of the Westboro Beach community as a traditional low rise residential neighborhood through including appropriate transition measures and architecture taking into account scale and massing, preserving access to natural light, minimizing shadowing, measures to minimize traffic and parking impacts on local streets, etc.
- Use of a proactive, collaborative and open planning and design process oriented to a collectively defined vision of the future of the site. The process would ensure that the range of interests, values, perspectives, and issues are identified, balanced, and incorporated in a meaningful way. The goal is to focus on creating synergy and finding agreement rather than on creating conflict and resolving disagreement.
- Incorporation of the best national and international architectural and urban planning and design solutions reflecting the statements in the *Inspirations* section above.
- Implementation of greening approaches representing the most progressive approaches to environmental sustainability, climate change, and energy use as are encompassed in the LEED standard.
- Maximization of the use of non-vehicular transportation through the promotion of public transportation, cycling, walking, and cross-country skiing.
- Minimization of vehicular impacts on Westboro Beach streets by only providing direct vehicle access to/from the site via Scott Street across the Transitway - with the possible exception of emergency vehicle access from Lanark Avenue, and provision of sufficient on-site parking,
- Landscape planning and design which emphasize the use of indigenous species, xeriscaping and sustainable water use.