

**Les Soeurs de la Visitation Convent
114 Richmond Road, 90 Richmond Road, and 380 Leighton Terrace**

Peer Review Panel Comments:
June 21, 2001

Background

The Panel was requested by the Planning and Growth Management Department of the City of Ottawa to review and comment on the submission for 114 Richmond Road, 90 Richmond Road, and 380 Leighton Terrace.

The Panel consists of three professionals, representing the fields of architecture, landscape architecture and heritage conservation.

- David Pontarini, architecture
- Greg Smallenberg, landscape architecture
- Michael McClelland, heritage conservation

The Panel was provided with the following information:

- Basic Site Plan and Design Principles for Redevelopment of 114 Richmond Road August 2009
- Heritage Survey and Evaluation Form – 114 Richmond Road
- Statement of Cultural Heritage Value – The Soeurs de al Visitation, 114 Richmond Road
- Designation Report – Ottawa Council March 09, 2010
- City of Ottawa Official Plan Amendment X – Land Use
- City of Ottawa Official Plan Amendment – Document 2 – Land Use
- Urban Design Guidelines for Development along Traditional Mainstreets
- Residential Land Strategy for Ottawa 2006-2031
- Ashcroft Homes - Preliminary Concept document, May 28, 2010
- Ashcroft Homes - Planning Rationale
- FoTenn for Ashcroft Homes - Key Policy Framework document, May 28, 2010
- +VG for Ashcroft Homes - Interim Cultural Heritage Impact Statement
- **A TREE INVENTORY**
- Island Park Community Association presentation document, June 11, 2010
- Hampton-Iona Community Group presentation document, June 11, 2010

The Panel also held a series of informative interviews with the proponent team, with City staff, with the local Councillor and with representatives of the Island Park and Hampton-Iona communities.

Response to Context

The Panel noted the unique location and inherently complex characteristics of the site; a large 5.46 acre lot containing historic resources, located adjacent to a stable low rise single family neighbourhood, fronting onto a traditional main street that is undergoing a new wave of intensification and redevelopment. The panel recognizes the complexity associated with redeveloping this unique site.

1. The Panel feels that the strategy for intensifying and redeveloping this site needs to balance a carefully considered approach to the three key elements of this site.
 - a. The existing stable residential context to the east and south of the site
 - b. The heritage buildings and portions of the surrounding landscape
 - c. The traditional main street, Richmond Road, which forms the northern boundary line of the site.
2. The proposed buildings are currently designed to step away from the surrounding low-rise residential neighbourhoods, in some case at the expense of the heritage resource. The heights of the buildings adjacent to the residential areas have for the most part been kept low, with most of the height being located adjacent to the Convent.
3. The Panel feels that the proposed development needs to better support and more carefully respond to the heritage structures and portions of the existing landscape.
4. The proposed condo building that fronts onto Richmond Road and creates a continuous street wall has been designed to step back as it rises to the west up to 12 storeys, however, other possibilities for responding to Richmond Road should be considered in order to relieve some of the pressure placed on the Convent. The transitions on the south side of the mixed-use building along Richmond Road need to step down and back away from the Convent in a more significant way

Site Plan Design

1. An alternate site plan that establishes a much wider landscape area along the east property line and includes the row of mature maple trees should be considered. Repositioning and / or consolidation of the buildings in the south quadrant to create a larger green open space, framed by built form and mature landscape, could vary the open space offerings of the overall development, reference the historic landscape of the Convent, provide more permeable surface to assist in ground water / storm water management, relax the relationship of the proposed building and the single family homes along Leighton Terrace and reinforce the strongly supported idea of a publicly accessible path from Byron Avenue to Richmond Road along the east property line by embedding the pathway within a thicker, mature landscape

2. Notwithstanding the philosophy expressed for obscuring the heritage house from an open Richmond Road view, slight variations on the portal location, particularly westward to reveal a bit more of the principal heritage house, should be explored. An additional, more intimately scaled pedestrian portal located west of the main portal being proposed could be considered. This would offer an additional way of penetrating the site from Richmond Road both physically and visually and could potentially create more activity in the courtyard space.
3. The site has two primary frontages along Richmond Road and along Byron Ave and a smaller frontage along Leighton Terrace. A fourth frontage exists at the end of Shannon Street, but has not been deemed a workable point of access to the site
4. The Richmond Road frontage will have one curb cut at the west end of the frontage for vehicle access to below grade parking. No curb cuts are being proposed along Leighton even though it would normally be considered a prime location for a curb cut as a secondary street connecting to a main street. No curb cut has been provided here in response to a request by the area residents. A curb cut has been proposed along Byron to provide a separate vehicle access point for the southern half of the development. The details of the design of this access point and its long –term impact on the Byron Ave linear park needs to be refined but is generally supported by the panel.
5. The arrangement of courtyards as a gesture to the historic patterns of open space on the site is interesting. This idea could be carried further by the creation of several transitional points within courtyard sequencing. Most of the proposed courtyards will likely be characterized by the built edges that form their respective edges and due to the diversity of architectural styles, both of the heritage buildings and the proposed new buildings, the courtyard idea could be made more vital if they responded in kind to these variation.
6. Consideration to repositioning Building #8 away from the Convent building should be given. In this instance, opportunities to enter into the heritage cloister garden from an external pathway system could be interesting and allow the cloister garden to become more a part of the open space experience of the development.

Building Form and Articulation

1. The Panel feels that careful consideration should be given to the following;
 - a. The current massing should be reviewed with particular attention being paid to the location of the highest building elements, currently located in the north east quadrant, adjacent to the Convent.
 - b. Consideration should be given to placing the tallest mass along Richmond Road, stepping down to the heritage resource and the single family homes along Leighton Terrace.

- c. The rental building in the middle of the site should be pulled away from the heritage resource. This building, although higher than the other buildings in south quadrant of the site, should also setback and step back from the heritage resource in a more significant way.
 - d. The four storey building adjacent to the row of mature maple trees should be reconsidered. The development team should consider eliminating this building altogether or shifting it further west in order to provide more space between the maples and any new buildings that are built in the south half of the site.
2. The building needs to be ‘massed harmoniously into the area’ which in this case means away from the low-rise residential areas to the east and south of the site with higher elements along the west and north boundaries.
3. The current scheme places the tallest portions of the buildings immediately adjacent to the heritage resource. The height of the buildings adjacent to the Convent should be lower and the building mass should set back and be stepped back away from the north and south faces of the existing Convent. In addition the portions of the buildings that are adjacent to the Convent should be kept low, stepping up in a gradual way to taller building forms.
4. The density and mass of the buildings on the north side of the site should be pushed away from the Convent, and positioned closer to Richmond Road. Consideration should be given to having the Richmond Road building designed to be a more consistent height along its entire frontage, extending from the west end of the site to the east end of the site. The developer indicated that a consistent street wall building with a height of 10 floors would be the equivalent density of the current 12 storey stepped building. The 10 storey building could be broken down both vertically and horizontally in order to reduce its mass. With a significant setback of any upper floors above 8 floors away from Richmond. The east and west end of the street wall building could then terrace down towards the north side of the Convent building at the west end and the existing single family houses adjacent to the east end of the building.
5. An alternate site plan that establishes a much wider landscape area along the east property line (to include the row of mature maple trees) should be considered. This could be achieved by shifting or repositioning and / or consolidating the buildings in the south east quadrant to create a larger green open space, framed by built form and mature landscape, As mentioned above, this could vary the open space offerings of the overall development, reference the historic landscape of the Convent, provide more permeable surface to assist in ground water / storm water management, relax the relationship of the proposed building and the single family homes along Leighton Terrace and reinforce the strongly supported idea of a publicly accessible path from Byron Avenue to Richmond Road along the east property line by embedding the pathway within a thicker, mature landscape. The east building could be shifted further east by tightening up the courtyard between the two north-south bar buildings that currently face each other. Alternatively the 4 storey mass on the east side could be

eliminated altogether with some of the density being shifted on to other buildings on the site.

6. This would enhance the current landscape and improve the open space ratio which exceeds the min are required, but seems rather low for a site of this size and significance.

Pedestrian Realm and Landscaping Strategy

1. Notwithstanding the developer's remarks regarding the difficulties in tree retention on site there is a significant inventory of existing mature trees on the property that should be considered in the further development of the proposed site plan. In particular, an impressive north-south row of maple trees aligning approximately parallel to the east property line could potentially make a strong contribution to the estate quality of the site while recalling some of the history of the Convent's south lawn and mature perimeter landscape. It should be noted that mature trees contribute a great deal to storm water management through the process of evapotranspiration and could be helpful in this regard given concerns for storm water management in this area.
2. **A tree inventory and arborist report is requested for review.** It would also be helpful to see the tree survey overlaid with a line drawing of the current site plan to examine where opportunities for tree retention might be possible. Although the developer noted difficulty in preserving existing trees during construction, partly because of ground water table changes resulting from excavations etc., there are a number of proven tree protection strategies that minimize tree loss in these instances and they should be considered.
3. Initial details describing a strategy to protect the large existing maple tree, shown as a part of the site plan proposal in the courtyard area east of the Convent building, would be helpful. In particular it would be useful to understand the proposed grades in this area in relationship to the existing grade at the base of that particular tree.
4. The proposed portal into the site from Richmond Road is an interesting feature and, as discussed with the proponent design team, could be detailed in ways that draw people into the site from the sidewalk. Wrapping the proposed Richmond Road retail façades south into the portal towards the courtyard was discussed as an idea worth pursuing and it would be helpful to see some illustrations of this approach.
5. The arrangement of courtyards as a gesture to the historic patterns of open space on the site is interesting. This idea could be carried further by the creation of several transitional points within courtyard sequencing. Most of the proposed courtyards will likely be characterized by the built edges that form their respective edges and due to the diversity of architectural styles, both of the heritage buildings and the proposed

new buildings, the courtyard idea could be made more vital if they responded in kind to these variations.

6. Consideration to repositioning Building #8 away from the Convent building should be given. In this instance, opportunities to enter into the heritage cloister garden from an external pathway system could be interesting and allow the cloister garden to become more a part of the open space experience of the development

Heritage Preservation

1. The Interim Cultural Heritage Impact Statement issued by the proponent team describes impacts which could adversely affect the heritage value of the site as:
 - a. "Height, massing and scale around heritage sensitive areas especially the cloister garden, the chapel and the house.
 - b. Building setbacks at the above sensitive areas could have negative impacts if they are insufficient."
2. The Panel agrees with this assessment. The location of the heritage resources has a major affect on how new buildings can be massed on the site. The sun shadow studies show that the cloister is significantly affected by the proximity of the proposed built form to the south. And the design of that attached built form demolishes portions of the Convent, including the south wing of the Convent. These are negative impacts and they should be avoided as the design moves forward.
3. The Planning Rationale report (March 2010) refers to the proposed south building as a hotel, with the Convent itself being for community purposes with commercial on the third floor. This hotel programme may have influenced the design of the proposed building and its siting so close to the Convent, including a proposed pool to the west of the Convent, but it is our understanding that this programme has now changed. We feel that any height of the building to the south should be distanced from the Convent and, most importantly, that a clear and strong idea for the adaptive re-use of the Convent needs to be developed as a component of the site plan application.
4. The building to the north of the Convent, facing Richmond and backing onto the Convent, comes very close to the Chapel. This relationship is not shown in the relevant Section F and needs to be addressed.
5. The Panel understands that there will be alterations proposed to the heritage structures for its adaptive reuse and possibly even carefully considered connections between the Convent and the new development. These can only be based however on a developed concept for reuse, a clear description of programmatic needs and a thorough heritage impact assessment.

6. The heritage significance of the site is rich. There is the Gothic Revival house, called *The Elms*, that sits on a small rise of land, and there is the later Convent structure with the Chapel. In their historic orientation, the house was entered from the east and the Convent was entered from the west. The differences in character of these structures needs to be clearly understood and reflected in any proposed alterations to them or their setting. While the proposed plan describes a series of community spaces, a clearer definition of interlinked spaces needs to be developed, in particular around the heritage complex. This could include intimately scaled routes around the Convent, possibly with a pedestrian connection to Richmond, distinct from the portal. This immediate landscape could adopt some of the character of the gardens to the north of the Convent. The Panel would encourage considering, depending on the adaptive reuse of the Convent, whether the central cloister courtyard itself might link up with these defined community spaces.
7. To the south the Panel is clear that a larger portion of land needs to be retained for the pedestrian route to Byron Avenue. The large row of Maples should be retained allowing for a stronger sense of the scale of the Convent's estate and gardens to be retained. This would be in contrast to the more intimate scale of the gardens immediately around the sides of the Convent.
8. The conservation of the heritage resources of the site is a significant undertaking. As the project goes forward it will be crucial that the implementation process for this conservation be developed. The heritage resources of the site are important public assets that can only be secured, as a long-term proposition, through a successful development of the property.

Sustainable Design

1. The Panel feels that this issue should be carefully considered as the development proceeds and recommends that the proponent continue to develop the sustainability strategy to make the development a model for infill development along traditional main streets.