

Meeting Notes

New Minas Secondary Planning Strategy (SPS)
Working Group Meeting
2021.08.10, 6:30pm to 8:30pm
Municipal Offices, Council Chambers

1. Opening

- » Checked in regarding a comment from member of the public that there was conflict between participants in the discussions at the Public Open House
 - Agreement that while there were certainly differing opinions around the table, participants acted within the bounds of respectful discussion

2. Project Update

- » Transportation Technical Study Phase 3 is pending selection of a Preferred Development Scenario
- » Public Open House update is covered under agenda item 4.

3. Presentation from Gary Morse

- » Has been in business in New Minas for 26 years, owning a variety of businesses in real estate and construction
- » Comments from a brief review of project documents:
 - Stakeholder interviews should include someone from real estate and construction, developers from outside the area to understand what would draw them, small businesses
 - New Minas should not be thought of as the “Service Centre of the Valley”; Kentville fills that role
 - Residential growth has been slow due to lack of land AND because of perception of New Minas as a non-residential community; New Minas South development could change this perception
 - Development densities in report were based on 8,000 SF lot size; suggest that is small for the Annapolis Valley context
 - Getting balance of commercial and residential uses right is hard
 - Traffic in New Minas has improved due to Granite Drive Interchange
 - Six-storey heights may be too high for people looking to get away from urban areas
 - Make Commercial Street more attractive
 - Will need new schools if level of development that is contemplated actually occurs; they should be near to parks and amenities, which will attract young families
- » Q from Working Group: We may indeed need new schools. Will we need new fire department?
 - A from Gary: I’m not sure

Presentation from Gary Morse cont'd

- » Q: How has market changed in the last while?
 - A: Quite different. Three years ago average time to sell a house would be 120 days, over the last six months it would be less than 30 days.
- » Q: There was a suggestion in the Market Demand Study to implement a maximum building size to prevent commercial uses from moving from Commercial Street to New Minas South. What do you think of that?
 - A: If Commercial Street is improved there may be no need for businesses to move. Getting the right mix is hard, but don't provide an incentive for people to move out of what you have because who is going to want to move into the older buildings? Invest in what you have to make it attractive. If someone has needs that cannot be met within the existing areas, work with them at that time to figure something out.

4. Public Workshop Results

- » Over last month have undertaken additional stakeholder interviews:
 - Town of Wolfville
 - Portal Youth
 - Annapolis Valley Trails Coalition
 - Gates Insurance / Annapolis Valley Chamber of Commerce
- » Continuing to work on other stakeholders
- » Public workshop included stations with background information, Guiding Principles, and discussion of development scenarios
- » Also had an online version of the public workshop for those who could not attend
- » Results are included in updated Engagement Report

5. Guiding Principles

- » Reviewed the public feedback on the Guiding Principles and Key Directions
- » **Motion:** Agreement with "Place for People" Guiding Principle and Key Directions
 - Passed
- » Q from Working Group: What do the "open space" areas mean on the development scenarios?
 - A from UPLAND: A discussion to be had as we get into nuts and bolts, but expectation is that some of these areas would be targeted for environmental protection, while others would have more of a recreational focus
- » **Motion:** Agreement with "Green Living" Guiding Principle and Key Directions
 - Motion: amend "solar" Key Direction to "solar and other green energy"
 - Follow-up discussion: Need to make sure that this is not enabling large-scale wind turbines, which may not be appropriate here
 - Amended motion passed
- » **Motion:** Agreement with "Regional Destination" Guiding Principle and Key Directions
 - Q: When we zone for commercial uses, does that include services?
 - A: It doesn't have to, but usually it would
 - Motion: amend "a regional destination for shopping" Key Direction to "a regional destination for shopping and services"
 - Amended motion passed
- » **Motion:** Agreement with "Thoughtful Development and Sustainable Services" Guiding Principle and Key Directions
 - Passed

6. Preferred Development Concept

- » Key messages regarding the development concepts that came out of Public Open House discussions:
 - Housing needs to be a priority in New Minas
 - There is a need to re-invest in Commercial Street
 - Better integrate residential and commercial to allow for easy access to services
 - Need to consider community amenities—schools, medical care, trails, etc.—this is sometimes too detailed for a Secondary Plan, but should have it in the back of our minds
 - Connectivity throughout the community
 - Access to green spaces and nature
 - The importance of the environment
- » Q for Working Group: Urban Design Study suggested a 6-storey height limit on Commercial Street. Is this appropriate?
 - Need to consider if this will turn off people who are trying to move away from busier communities; however, there is a 5-story building going up in Miners Landing
 - Valley has “quaint” character
 - Would 6-story buildings cause an issue with fire services? No, New Minas Fire Department has capacity to fight fires up to six storeys
 - Valley does have quaint character, but one of the ways we protect that is by directing dense growth to Growth Centres like New Minas
 - Not worried about the height of the building, need to worry about style and landscaping to make Commercial Street attractive
 - What does this do to traffic? UPLAND answers: Phase 3 of Traffic Study is going to provide recommendations regarding access control, etc.
 - Agree that design is more important than height
 - It's far more economical to build six storeys
 - What about access to green spaces? Will people in high-rise buildings have a good quality of life?
 - 6-storey buildings won't happen overnight; it will happen over years. Also need to think about placement to make sure there is minimal impact.
 - Through regulations we can indeed control placement, “stepbacks” of upper floors
 - **Agreement around Working Group on permitting up to six storeys on Commercial Street**

Preferred Development Concept cont'd

- » Q for Working Group: The County Fair Mall site does not appear to have a long-term future as an enclosed mall. This is a significant site, with a few options for regulation: we could simply enable a variety of types of development, or could implement requirements for what is expected in terms of development. How do you want to approach this site?
 - If we don't *require* the owners to do something, does that mean they can do whatever they want within the bounds of the zoning? Can they leave the land vacant? UPLAND answer: We can't force anyone to develop; however, when they do develop we can either put a broad set of basic requirements (zoning) that give them a box to work in, or we can write a specific policy for the site that includes specific requirements that outline specific expectations for the development of the site.
 - Private sector is far better at knowing what should happen.
 - Can we just leave it zoned for commercial uses? UPLAND answer: if we go the route of having basic zoning, engagement results suggest we should also enable the owner to develop residential uses if they want to.
 - A development agreement approach will allow us to review building design, require greenspace, etc.
 - Will this prevent them from doing what they want?
 - If we go through a development agreement process, does that allow us to work through some of the items that came up in engagement? Answer: yes.
 - **Agreement around Working Group on considering high density mixed-use development of the mall site by development agreement.**

Preferred Development Concept cont'd

- » Q for Working Group: Summary and Scenarios Report contains three preliminary development scenarios. From a residential perspective, which of the three scenarios is the preferred option as a starting point for the draft Secondary Plan, and are there any tweaks that should be made?
 - Looking out for development that could take 100 years is hard. Will need to have a mix of housing options.
 - These planning documents are “living documents”; while we set a course now we can certainly amend and adapt in the future.
 - Are we voting on the whole picture, or just the residential component?
Answer: just residential
 - **Agreement around Working Group to focus on Option 3 (highest density)**
 - What about the lands north of the Kent? UPLAND answer: We've flagged that one as a site-specific discussion for our next meeting.
 - What about behind Home Depot? How is that currently zoned? Answer: O1 and R5. Will flag this one for future discussion.
 - How does this development move forward over 50+ years? UPLAND answer: fundamentally, this will be market-driven. The big piece from an implementation point-of-view is infrastructure. We expect to see some type of phasing, with three phases naturally created by the ravines.
 - We need to have this plan in place to enable discussions around who is paying for infrastructure like the Connector Road.
 - Worried that a phased approach will make it hard to do certain types of land uses that are only permitted in one area of the plan until infrastructure has been extended to that area.
- » Q for Working Group: Summary and Scenarios Report contains three preliminary development scenarios. From a commercial perspective, which of the three scenarios is the preferred option as a starting point for the draft Secondary Plan, and are there any tweaks that should be made?
 - Should have more commercial. All land within the east of the first ravine should be commercial, with a small area dedicated to highway commercial.
 - Portions of the eastern phase back onto low-density residential. Also need to consider that the eastern phase is likely the first that will be developed; if it is all commercial it could be awhile before residential development is possible in New Minas South.
 - Suggest mixed-use; the more flexibility the better.
 - Will space be needed for a round-about? Answer: these smaller details will be considered at more detailed stages of development.
 - Can we unlock the west side for residential at the same time as the commercial development on the east?

Preferred Development Concept cont'd

- Super-imposing the area of the eastern phase onto an existing areas of New Minas, it would cover an area boxed in a line north from Highway 101 to the east end of Meadow View, across to Walmart, and back up to the highway. It is 5.5 times larger than the County Fair Mall site.
- Agree to more commercial; we're talking 25-50 years and need room to grow.
- This is a plan for the county as well as New Minas; the demand for commercial comes from a larger area than just New Minas. Have a fear that if we hem commercial lands in with residential, it will force leap-frogging of commercial development.
- Need to manage aesthetics and traffic and noise.
- There are two little portions of residential on the far eastern end that should be commercial. UPLAND responds: those areas are on the other side of a watercourse and they will be difficult to service; they are better thought of as extensions of the adjacent unserved residential neighbourhoods just outside the Growth Centre boundary.
- Could Granite Drive extension into New Minas South be re-aligned to allow for development on both sides of it? UPLAND answers: the alignment has been well studied and while there may be small adjustments during detailed design due to on-site analysis and testing, the proposed conceptual alignment is likely the best.
- The small area identified for commercial on the west end will be unsightly for residents of Canaan Ridge.
- If we zone commercial it's easier to zone back to residential.
- The land that is identified in Scenario 3 is approximately four Walmart properties in size. That is not enough?
- We may end up with a mixed use approach with residential over commercial.
- Worried about losing commercial businesses to other communities if we try to put limits on them.
- There is a risk that if we enable wide-scale commercial development in New Minas South that businesses will leave Commercial Street.
- » **Motion:** move the commercial lands in the western end to the eastern end.
 - Passed
- » **Motion:** designate all of the lands east of the eastern ravine for commercial.
 - Need a park providing a view in this area.
 - **Amending motion:** Designate all of the lands east of the eastern ravine for commercial and mixed-use.
 - Amended motion passed.

7. Closing