

Report on SPIRIT Place Open House

April 26, 2010

St. John's United Church held an open house in the Lillian Piercy auditorium at the Conservatory, Chebucto Road, Halifax on April 26, 2010. The event was attended by about 80-90 people from the immediate and wider community including a large number from St. John's congregation. The purpose of the Open House was to bring the adjacent neighbors and wider community up to date with the status of the proposed development of SPIRIT Place and to gather feedback from interested parties.

The Open House consisted of a series of 6 stations: St. John's mission and programs, Spirit Place themes and purpose, Saint Vincent's Nursing Home, Community, Michael Napier Architects, and Halifax Regional Municipality. The intent in establishing the stations was to enable persons who had questions regarding a specific subject to access that information in a timely manner by asking questions or commenting on items relating to the project.

Many people were keen to respond and provide feedback, some of which was done at the time by one-to-one dialogue and others did so through written evaluations (28 people) and written comments on flip chart papers at the various stations. A variety of subjects were identified as were a number of questions. To assist in the evaluation of the open house this summary was undertaken. Below are the topics identified with examples of the comments made.

Written Evaluations (28)

1. Do you have any questions or comments about St. John's United Church? For example, questions about St. John's mission, social justice or why the congregation decided to build Spirit Place?

The majority of responses to the proposed development of SPIRIT Place were positive.

Example: *This is a fabulous project. Seniors need a place to go on the peninsula. I personally do not wish to move to Clayton Park!*

Several comments were questions regarding the project. Example: *Why such a large project?*

2. Do you have any questions or comments about the services to be provided by St. Vincent's?

Several of the responses indicated that some people were aware of the services that could be provided by St. Vincent's however other responses indicated that people were unaware of who could live in SPIRIT Place and the services that would be available.

Example: *I appreciate the need for seniors housing and services. I do wonder what will be offered for young families.*

3. Do you have any questions or comments about the city planning process? For example, questions about zoning, public information meetings or public hearings?

The responses for those with and without questions were equal. The questions related to the city planning process and zoning. Example: *When is the zoning permit to be applied for?* Other responses indicated that people were aware of the process. Example: *A little disappointed that a service oriented use requires such a lengthy process.*

4. Do you have any questions or comments about the architectural plans for Spirit Place? For example, questions about demolition, parking, the exterior or size of the building or green space?

The responses covered a variety of items; design and density, community garden and gardens on terraces or roof and parking (underground and on-street).

The responses identified here indicated that some people were very concerned about the design and the proposed building size. Example: *I have huge issues surrounding the size of the development in a R2 residential neighbourhood – 6-7 stories, 60 – 70 units – the impact will be enormous in a negative way. The architectural plans are UGLY; not in keeping with the architectural grammar in place.*

Several comments related to the type of colors for the building. Example: *The residential section looks like ‘spice’ – more subtle colors and more traditional (ie like Windsor Street) in the exterior would help Spirit Place be a better fit for the neighbours. I found the glazing along the ground level made the project look like a commercial development – it reminded me of a strip mall.*

Other responses indicated some people were pleased with the design and size. Example: *Architectural plans of Spirit Place look great. All aspects have been balanced.*

Some questions related to parking, underground and on-street. Example:

- a. *Parking – is 35 car spaces a reasonable number?*
- b. *Where will the church members park – on the streets?*

Some questions also related to gardens. Example:

- a. *Could you include a community garden space?*
- b. *Will there be room for gardens on the terraces or on the roof?*

5. Do you have any other questions or comments?

Many of these responses were positive. Example: *As a property owner on Willow Street I feel this would enhance the area. After it is built people will become used to it as they are with the current building. Change is scaring people.*

Several responses indicated concern. Example: *I totally disagree with this development and will work hard to present my views to the city council as a member of this community who is unrepresented in this process.*

6. Did you find the open house useful?

Of the 28 people who completed the evaluations, 24 people indicated that yes, they found the open house useful.

7. St. John's is considering having another public information session a few weeks from now. Please tell us which of the following you are interested in attending (you may choose more than one).

The responses were as follows:

1. Nineteen responses indicated a presentation by the architects followed by a question and answer session.
2. Six responses indicated small group sessions to discuss particular topics and
3. One response, another open house; and one response, I am not interested in attending another session.

Comments from Flip Charts at Stations

Architects Station

The majority of responses indicated that the proposed height of the building was a serious concern. Example: *Totally unacceptable in the size; a low rise residential neighbourhood is no place of a 7 story.*

Other responses indicated that a building of lesser height would be acceptable. Example: *I agree that the reasons & facilities are needed but the building will be too large for this residential area. Even in the commercial areas of Windsor Street no other buildings are this tall. Please limit to 4-5 stories.*

A couple of responses indicated this building is seen as a positive. Example: *A great revival of an old neighbourhood and a great place to live. Keep your head above the sand.*

St. Vincent's Station

The responses at this station were equally divided between those for and against the project. Example: *I am very much in favour of this project. Not only is the facility needed, but St. John's is a wonderful group of caring people who can and do make a positive impact on the community.*

Example: *As a member of the community living on Windsor St., half a block from the church, I am very upset about this development. A 7 story building with 60 – 70 units in a residential neighbourhood is outrageous and will change the flavour of the community in a negative way. I am surprised at how the church talks of engaging the greater community at large but does not respond to its concerns, turning a blind ear and eye to the outcry.*

Community Station

Suggestions on use of community space

There was one comment. *We do not need this as a community gathering place. There are numerous halls, churches and schools in which to gather.*

Other comments:

Although there were quite a few comments, positive and negative, the majority of responses here indicated people were most concerned about the design and density of the project. Example: *This proposal is an architectural insult to our predominantly Victorian neighbourhood. The design looks like bad 1970s architecture. Please don't ruin our neighbourhood with this ugly building.*

A few responses indicated they wanted the project but not the proposed design or size. Example: *Although I love having St. John's in our neighbourhood and their intentions are entirely commendable, the architecture and size of the proposed building is completely insensitive to the architecture and tone of the neighbourhood. Please try again.*

Several responses indicated they welcomed the project. Example. *As a property owner of Willow St., I feel that this is a well thought out project. The height is only marginally higher than the existing building. The new building, like the old, will be lower on the back (away from Windsor).*

Several other responses were questions regarding apartment rental costs. Example. *How does what Spirit Place is offering seniors through St. Vincent's compare with other options, such as a regular apartment with Meals on Wheels and hiring a housekeeper or Parkland (Shannex) with a movie theatre, bowling alley and comparable rent?*

Conclusion

This report was prepared with the intent to give the reader an overview of the responses obtained during the open house. This report will be shared with the congregation of St. John's and the wider community so that there is a greater understanding of citizens' responses to the proposed development. The report will be posted on the church website.