

RIENS Engagement Session #2 – What we heard

The second public meeting for the RIENS study was held on June 14, 2016 in Victoria Park. The meeting began at 6:30 p.m. and ended at 8:30 p.m. For the first 30 minutes, members of the public arrived and signed in and included their names on a mailing list if needed and reviewed a number of boards and discussed the project with staff and the consultants.

At 7:00 p.m., Nick McDonald of Meridian Planning gave a presentation on the project that identified the overall intent of the project, some of its background, its current status and the product of the work to date.

In this regard, Mr. McDonald indicated that an Issues and Options Report has been prepared that reviews the scope of the project, the nature of the study area and the state of intensification in the City's intensification areas. This same report also identifies the zoning rules that currently apply in the neighbourhoods along with the current planning approval processes that exist for various types of applications. The report then identifies a number of options with respect to changes in the zoning rules and changes in the way applications for development are processed. Mr. McDonald also indicated that this report was presented to Kitchener City Council on May 16, 2016 and is available on the City's website for review and public input.

We heard the following questions after this presentation:

- Can a control be implemented to control the rear wall or depth of dwelling? *Yes, but this is not a control that is currently used by the City.*
- Who comprises the stakeholder group? *At the first meeting, an announcement was made to those in attendance to sign up to be on the stakeholder group.*
- What are the Ottawa and Edmonton methods mentioned in the presentation? *Ottawa uses a streetscape character analysis and Edmonton uses a development permit system. These are explained at length in the report that is available online (www.kitchener.ca/RIENS), however these options deal with process and the focus on today's meeting is on compatibility and character.*

Comments made by the public:

- Rooflines are important but don't necessarily need to be the same.
- Concern that the study does not address the ability to walk by or pass through neighbourhoods because trails and paths that were once used through vacant lots are being developed with infill. As a result, this impacts social character because of the lost connection.

As mentioned in the presentation, the RIENS study involves the making of recommendations on what zoning rules should apply and what planning processes should be relied upon in established residential areas. As a result, the consulting team wanted public input on what elements of compatibility and/or character need to be regulated in some way or considered as part of a planning approval process.

As a consequence, the second part of the engagement session was an interactive session that involved using clickers to 'vote' on elements that contribute to compatibility and character. In order to gauge the public's preferences, participants were asked to identify their preference using voting software.

This allowed the consulting team to better understand and discern the public's preferences on the relative importance of the character elements that were presented. In this regard, these elements included height, setback from the front lot line, location of garage, width of interior side yard and architectural character. Participants were taken through a number of images and asked to provide their opinion on whether they thought the home in the middle was compatible with the homes on either side.

Throughout and following the engagement session, we heard the following questions:

- Does this study consider compatibility in terms of zoning? *Yes, the report that is available online (www.kitchener.ca/RIENS) identifies a list of potential options, others of which include amendments to Official Plan policies, updates to site plan control, updates to the urban design manual, potential change in process and notification for planning applications.*

Comments made by the public:

- Concern that this study is focused on implementing more preventative measures rather than encouraging infill.
- Concern that the study process doesn't explore the personal connections and neighbour-to-neighbour interactions that occur in neighbourhoods and that make each area unique.
- Indicated that, in some cases, neighbourhoods are diverse and that is the distinct character.
- Suggest that other elements, such as porches, should be included in the study because it contributes to place making.
- Suggest that the study consider the relationship between neighbourhoods in terms of permanent residents and renters and how changes to current standards may impact the viability of the renting market.