Councillor Jason Farr  
Planning Committee Chair  
Hamilton City Hall  
Ontario

SUBJECT: Hamilton's Design Review Panel

Dear Councillor Farr,

I am writing to SUPPORT the recommendation to the Planning Committee to establish a Design Review Panel for a two year pilot period on the 13th of August.

PREAMBLE

I am a chartered town planner and urban designer with more than 25 years experience in urban conservation, in London and elsewhere in the UK. I was born in Hamilton and spent my first 18 years living in Westdale. My family remains in Hamilton and I know the city well.

The majority of my professional life was been in the UK, where I established London's first Design Review Panel in 2006. The benefits of local panels are now widely understood in the UK, so much so that the Government now encourages local authorities to establish panels in their recently issued National Planning Policy Framework. I sit on the Design Council CABE’s National Panel, as well as Southwark’s and Wandworth’s Local DRPs.

COMMENT

Hamilton is a great city, with much to offer. I have seen first-hand several locally based initiatives to improve the experience of the city. Local design review arrangements provide assessment and support to ensure high standards of design, which help raise the standard of design more generally in the area. Public benefit is delivered by improving the quality of architecture, landscape architecture and urban design, including the design of streets and public spaces.

An independent panel of experts – can appraise schemes objectively, they advise and empower decision makers on how to improve design quality to meet the needs of their community. Panels support decision makers in resisting poorly designed schemes and offer comments on schemes that will lead to their improvement.

As the Design and Conservation Manager at the London Borough of Southwark, we had numerous projects to deal with, including ‘The Shard’ and the Tate Modern Extension. Housing developments were also coming forward, which were disappointing in terms of their contextual response and quality. I had experience taking schemes to the UK’s National panel at the Commission of Architecture and the Built Environment (CABE) and felt that a local panel could offer considerable support. We never looked back. We did however experience opposition from some developers, but most were cooperative because a supportive panel report meant a smoother journey through the planning process and Southwark was presented with a better product. We secured buy-in because high quality design makes financial sense.

Design review works because it:
• Gives decision makers confidence that they have had the best possible independent advice on design quality;
• Offers support and encouragement for good design;
• Identifies weak and inappropriate schemes at an early stage, when radical design changes can be made with relatively little waste of time and effort;
• Can bring a breadth and depth of experience beyond that of the project team or planning authority;
• Offers expert views on complex issues such as sustainability;
• Puts schemes in perspective and sees the bigger picture;
• Can question the design brief or site assumptions;
• Offers opportunities to those observing design reviews for continued learning particularly on how to assess schemes for good design.

I hope this initiative is supported, and a panel is established. The seeds of change have been sowed. Hamilton deserves the best built environment that can be delivered.

Yours sincerely,

Julie Greer RTPI, IHBC
Director

for and on behalf of

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