

# Visual Impact Assessment

## 1629-1655 Main Street West, City of Hamilton

City of Hamilton

Official Plan and Zoning By-law Amendments

October 2020



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Our File: 19192

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# 1. Introduction

The following Visual Impact Assessment has been prepared by GSP Group Inc. to assess the visual impacts as a result of the proposed redevelopment on the lands municipally addressed as 1629-1655 Main Street West in the City of Hamilton (referred to as “the Site”) (**Figure 1**). The Site has been consolidated from 3 separate parcels, known municipally as 1629 Main Street West, 1635/1637 Main Street West, and 1655 Main Street West. The Site encompasses the northern portion of the block bounded by Ewen Drive to the west, Main Street West to the north, and Rifle Range Road and has frontage on all three of these streets.

The Site has approximately 114.5 m of frontage along Main Street West, 70 m along Rifle Range Road, and 49.5 m along Ewen Road and has an area of approximately 0.69 hectares (post-road widenings). Official Plan Amendment (“OPA”) and Zoning By-law Amendment (“ZBA”) applications are required to facilitate the proposed development.



*Rendering of Proposed Development. Source: McCallum Sather.*

## Overview of Proposed Development

The proposed redevelopment is comprised of three (3) residential towers connected via a common 12-storey mixed-use podium with at-grade retail along Main Street West. Tower A, located within the western portion of the Site closest to Ewen Road, is proposed at 16-storeys; Tower B is proposed at 21 storeys within the centre of the Site; and Tower C is proposed at 25 storeys within the eastern portion of the Site closest to Rifle Range Road. A total of 583 residential apartment units are proposed with 308 parking spaces contained in one (1) level of underground parking and three (3) levels of above-grade parking.



*Rendering of Proposed Development. Source: McCallum Sather.*

## Assessment Purpose and Scope

For the purposes of this Visual Impact Assessment (VIA), “visual impact” is meant generally as the extent of change in the visual landscape created by a proposed development. Per the City’s policies, the visual landscape for this purpose includes both the natural landscape as well as the built landscape. This VIA is meant to be read in conjunction with the other design-related reports prepared as part of the complete application for a fulsome discussion of the proposed building’s impacts.



Site Location

Source: Google Earth (2020), Conservation Hamilton (2020)

Figure  
**A**

This VIA explores three potential impacts from the proposed development:

- Potential visual impacts related to the Niagara Escarpment (located both north and south of the Site);
- Potential visual impacts on the surrounding streetscape (Main Street West, Ewen Road, Rifle Range Road) including the residential areas south and north of the Site; and
- Potential visual impacts on the skyline and on sky views.

This VIA models 14 viewpoints throughout the broader area plus one view from a more distant vantage points (i.e. vistas) to explore the above scope (see **Figure B**). These viewpoints include views along Main Street West from the west and east at longer, middle and short views (Osler Drive to Cootes Drive); views along Ewen Road and Rifle Range Road from the south at longer, middle and short views (Whitney Avenue to Main Street West); and views from the residential area north of Main Street West (W Park Avenue and Westbourne Road).

## 2. Policy and Guideline Basis

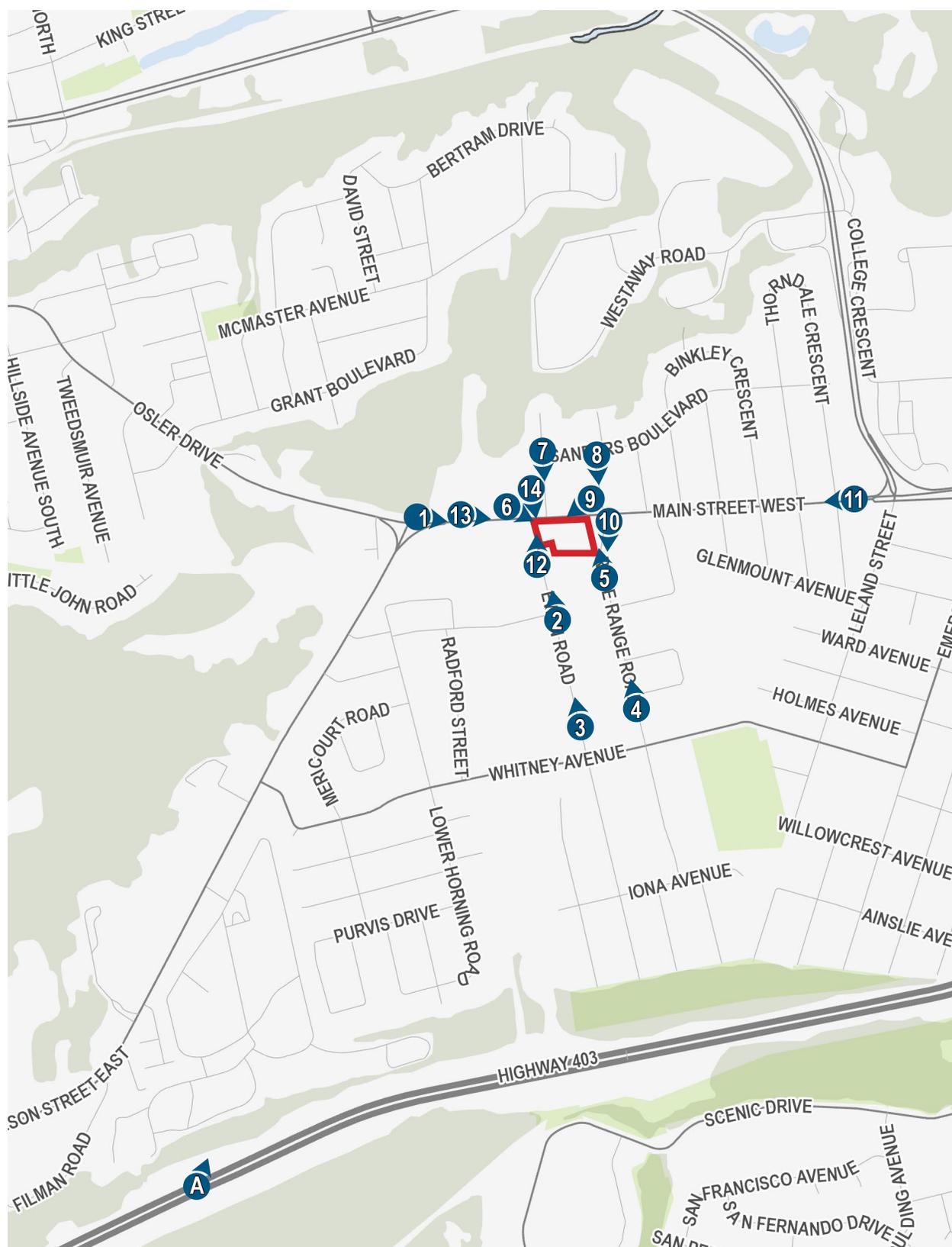
### **Urban Hamilton Official Plan and Ainslie Wood Westdale Secondary Plan**

The Site is designated “Mixed Use - Medium Density” on “Schedule E-1 Urban Land Use Designations” and “Mixed Use - Medium Density” on “Land Use Plan”, Map B.6.2-1 of the Ainslie Wood Westdale Secondary Plan (“AWWSP”). Main Street West is also identified as a “Secondary Corridor” on “Schedule E - Urban Structure” of the UHOP.

Secondary corridors serve to link nodes and employment areas or primary corridors (E.2.4.5). Several secondary corridors are characterized by single use buildings and the intent of the UHOP is to allow for the evolution of these corridors to provide an increasing proportion of multiple storey, mixed-use buildings in small cluster locations with at-grade retail and service commercial uses. The built form along urban corridors (primary and secondary corridors) are to generally consist of low to mid-rise forms with some areas allowed to accommodate high density and high-rise building forms.

The Mixed Use Medium Density designation in the AWWSP encourages mixed uses with residential apartments on upper floors of commercial buildings located along arterial and collector roads. The requested amendment to the AWWSP is to permit a height of 24 storeys whereas 3 is currently permitted and to permit a residential density of 791 units per hectare (“uph”) whereas 49 uph is currently permitted.

With respect to views, Section 3.3.5 of the Urban Hamilton Official Plan generally describes public views and vistas as *“significant visual compositions of important public and historic buildings, natural heritage and open space features, landmarks, and skylines which enhance the overall physical character of an area when viewed from the public realm. Vistas are generally panoramic in nature while views usually refer to a strong individual feature often framed by its surroundings. Examples of*



Key Map  
 Source: Hamilton Open Data (2020)



*existing significant vistas include the panorama of the Niagara Escarpment, Hamilton Harbour and the Downtown skyline as viewed from various vantage points throughout the City.” In terms of incorporation of views and vistas, Section 3.3.5.2 of the Urban Hamilton Official Plan identifies that “views and vistas shall be achieved through alignment of rights-of- way, layout of pedestrian circulation and open space systems, and the siting of major features, public uses, and built form”.*

The AWWSP contains policies which state that views and vistas are important to the Ainslie Wood Westdale area, including views of the Niagara Escarpment and Cootes Paradise. These views and vistas are to be identified and preserved in development and redevelopment (Vol. 2 B.6.2.13.2). The development review process shall incorporate the preservation of views and vistas.

### **Tall Building Guidelines**

These guidelines are only required by Official Plan policy to be addressed when located in the Downtown Hamilton Secondary Plan area but have been consistently applied to development applications outside of the Downtown to act as best-use-principles for buildings taller than 12 storeys. Section 3.4 of the Tall Building Guidelines establishes guidance for taller buildings responds to Hamilton’s “unique conditions and features”:

- a. Any development application shall identify, maintain and enhance viewing opportunities towards the Escarpment;*
- b. Tall buildings should be located in a fashion that preserves key views to existing landmarks and termini to and from the Downtown;*
- c. Tall buildings shall contribute to an interesting skyline and be sufficiently spaced apart to minimize the loss of sky views;*
- d. The silhouette of existing important landmark buildings should be protected, and the view corridor leading to them should remain legible;*
- e. Tower step backs should be increased to preserve the view to an existing important local landmark; Tall Buildings within Downtown Hamilton should respond to the city’s unique topography and landscape, including the Escarpment and the Waterfront.*
- f. Views of the Escarpment should be preserved; and,*
- g. An assessment of impact on views to/from the Escarpment will be required as part of development applications.*

Visual impacts can be categorized as either direct or indirect. Direct impacts result from the physical blocking or obstruction of a key view. In this case, the policies above speak to the Niagara Escarpment and Cootes Paradise. Indirect impacts result from changing the context at the periphery of the view.

### 3. Modelling and Simulation

The below outlines the progression of the method used for the modelling and photo-simulations used in this VIA.

1. A 3D Model of the proposed building was prepared by the architect and sent to GSP Group. GSP Group geo-referenced the model using SketchUp, survey information, and Google Earth.
2. Specific view and vista points were selected based on the policy direction to protect views to the escarpment (north and south of the Site) and to maximize sky views along the surrounding streetscapes. **Figure B** illustrates the location of the selected vista and viewpoints for detailed modelling.
3. Photographs were taken on August 18, 2020 by GSP Group staff, mid-point on the sidewalk at a height of approximately 1.7 metres from the ground surface. Camera settings were set to replicate a pedestrian visual perspective. This VIA uses a combination of site photos and Google Streetview perspectives.
4. The photo-simulation of each viewpoint (Figures 1 through 14) compares the existing view using the photograph and the proposed view showing the 3D Model with the proposed building inserted to show the visual landscape at each viewpoint

### 4. Local Context and Visual Characteristics

The Site and surrounding area is relatively flat and comprised of predominately paved surfaces with the exception of a large sodded boulevard along Rifle Range Road. Existing vegetation, based on a Tree Management Plan prepared by GSP Group, includes 12 trees that are proposed to be removed. The Site includes three (3) individual parcels: 1629 Main Street West, 1635-1637 Main Street West, and 1655 Main Street West. There are four (4) existing buildings that are proposed to be demolished to facilitate the proposed building.

The Site is located on the northern edge of the Ainslie Wood Neighbourhood. This neighbourhood extends from Main Street West to the north, generally following the eastern property limit of St. Mary Catholic Secondary School to the west, the Chedoke Expressway to the south, and the hydro corridor to the west. The Site is located approximately 600 m (10 minutes) to the west of McMaster University, 1 km to the east of Dundas, and 3 km north east of Ancaster.

Ainslie Wood is comprised of a variety of land uses with Main Street West being a commercial/retail corridor with a number of restaurants, medical offices, and retail stores, and surface parking areas. Located further south is the Mondelez facility and a supermarket (Fortinos) along with St. Mary Catholic Secondary School. South of the Mondelez facility and school, the uses are predominately residential with 1-2 storey dwellings. Alexander park is located south of the school which includes playground equipment, four (4) baseball diamonds, a splash pad, and large grassed areas.

The Ainslie Wood neighbourhood differs from the Ainslie Wood West neighbourhood to the west and the Ainslie Wood East neighbourhood to the east as the larger scale commercial, employment, and institutional uses in Ainslie Wood extend further into the interior of the neighbourhood and these uses are not limited to Main Street West which is the case for both adjacent neighbourhoods. For Ainslie Wood West and East, almost all of the commercial and retail uses are focused along Main Street West rather than the interior of the neighbourhood.

When perceiving the Site and surrounding area either by walking, cycling, or driving in a vehicle, the portion of the Niagara Escarpment south of the Site is visible at 3 general instances:

1. The Escarpment is visible atop a limited number of 1- and 2-storey commercial buildings on the south side of Main Street West when standing on the north side of Main Street West, depending on the distance between the sidewalk and the building face (the greater the setback between the sidewalk and building face, the more likely the escarpment will be visible);
2. The Escarpment is visible from both sides of the street in-between buildings that provide surface parking between the buildings; and
3. The Escarpment is visible at street intersections as the right-of-way provides a clear sight line south towards the Escarpment.

The Escarpment north of the Site is also partially visible when looking north along Ewen Road. This portion of the Escarpment is not visible from any other vantage points surrounding the Site due to its distance from the Site and due to buildings and trees obscuring the sightlines to the Escarpment.



Niagara Escarpment North of Site  
Located  $\pm 2.5$  km to the north

Niagara Escarpment South of Site  
Located  $\pm 1.1$  km to the south



Site

## 5. Assessment

### a. Niagara Escarpment Views

As per the AWWSP, views to the Escarpment are to be identified and preserved. As mentioned on the previous page, the sightlines to the Escarpment south of the Site from the surrounding area are limited due to the distance from the Escarpment and due to existing buildings along Main Street West that currently block views. The sightlines to the south that exist in the area occur looking south along the Ewen Road (**View 14**) and Rifle Range Road (**View 10**) from Main Street West as well as from Westbourne Road (**View 8**) and West Park Avenue (**View 7**), located north of Main Street West. These sightlines are not prominent public views given the local nature of the surrounding north-south streets.

**View 10** shows that the view to the Escarpment looking south along Rifle Range Road is partially obstructed by the proposed 3-storey podium and this view would have the same impact on the view to the Escarpment under as-of-right zoning conditions as it would with the proposed development. This view is already partially obstructed by existing trees under the existing conditions.

As shown on **View 8**, the view of the Escarpment south along Rifle Range Road when viewed at from Westbourne Avenue would not block existing views and therefore would have no direct impacts on the view to the Escarpment due to the large public boulevard east of the Site between the sidewalk and the Site's eastern property line. The proposed building will be on the periphery of the view and will not impact the public sightline to the Escarpment.

**View 7** shows that the existing view to the escarpment looking south along West Park Avenue would be obstructed completely by the 3-storey building podium but would be blocked under the as-of-right zoning conditions as well. The skyway above the podium between Towers A and B demonstrates that a building 3-storeys in height (permitted under current zoning) would present the same impact as the Escarpment is not visible through this break in massing. The 3-storey building height is currently permitted as-of-right under the existing Zoning and AWWSP. Based on this, although this particular sightline to the Escarpment will not be maintained in its existing state as a result of the proposed development, the portion of the building that will obscure the Escarpment is the 3-storey podium and not the massing above. For this reason, the proposed impact is appropriate and acceptable. **View 14** demonstrates that the view south along Ewen Road towards the Escarpment will not be impacted as the existing buildings and trees already partially obstruct the view to the escarpment and the portion of the Escarpment that is currently visible will remain visible.

Regarding the views to the Escarpment to the north, the only sightline that exists is looking north along Ewen Road (**Views 2 and 3**). A small portion of the Escarpment is currently visible at the terminus of the street but, otherwise, looking towards and through the Site, the Escarpment is obstructed by existing trees and buildings. With the proposed development, the view to the Escarpment at the terminus of the street will be preserved.

When viewed from the Niagara Escarpment (**View 15**), the building is visible and will be viewed together with other buildings in the area, notably west of the Site. The building does not overpower the skyline and fits within the context of the surrounding area which is comprised of a combination of tree canopy and pockets of built-up areas where buildings extend beyond the height of the tree canopy.

### **b. Main Street West Streetscape and Skyline/Sky Views**

“Skyline” views are those longer views of the building’s height viewed together with the broader context. **Views 1, 11** and **View 15** show the proposed building from longer distance. Given the terrain of the area, there are a limited number of locations where the building is visible from a longer distance. One view from Main Street West at Norfolk Street (approximately 600 m to the east of the Site near McMaster University) was assessed (**View 11**) and one view from Osler Drive and Main Street West (approximately 300 m to the west) (**View 1**). From west of the Site (**View 11**), the building will be visible from this viewpoint and appears as 1 building mass rather than 3 towers when viewed from the short side of the development. The proposed 3-storey podium and stepbacks down from each tower towards Main Street West are accentuated from this view. The visible portion of the podium demonstrates that the podium is consistent with the height of the existing buildings along Main Street West. The 10-storey massing portion of the building is also shown to be proportionate to the right-of-way width of Main Street West.

From east of the Site (**View 1**), the building also appears as 1 mass rather than 3 separate masses when viewed from the short side of the development, minimizing the visual impact of the proposed development. The west tower (Tower A) is the shortest of the 3 towers at 16-storeys and is the tower most visible from this view. The gradual increase in height from west to east plus the separation distance between the towers minimizes the visual impact of the building as the 25-storey Tower C is hidden behind Tower A with only the uppermost storey of Tower B being visible. The massing is viewed together with the broader context from this view which includes the 9-storey residential building at 1686 Main Street West.

“Sky views” are defined by the Tall Building Guidelines as the *“ability to see the sky, unobstructed by buildings, from the opposite side of a street”*. The TBG encourage the design of tall buildings to minimize the loss of sky views and to avoid the negative effects of diminished sky views. The Tall Building Guidelines principally speak to ensuring separation between towers to maximize sky views, minimize shadowing, and to break up the massing of a building. As mentioned above, the stepbacks, tower separation, and the open-air break in massing on the 4th storey between each tower breaks up the massing and facilitates views of the sky through the building. The more immediate views along Main Street West (**Views 6, 9, and 13**) provide these views to assess sky views.

When viewed from the north side of Main Street West slightly west and east of the Site (**Views 6, 9, and 13**), the development appears as one large mass as the 4th-storey skyways are not visible and the tower separation is not evident due to the overlapping of the towers. These design elements open up the sky views when the building is viewed perpendicularly (**Views 2, 3, 4, 7, 12**). Therefore, the visual impacts of the building when viewed from the oblique views in **Views 6, 9, and 13** move quickly as you move past the Site and are positioned more perpendicular to the building.

Furthermore, streetscaping efforts are proposed to improve the pedestrian experience on main Street West and offset the visual impacts of the proposed massing on the pedestrian perception. These elements are proposed to mitigate the negative effects of diminished skyviews (i.e. reduced sunlight) on the Main Street West streetscape adjacent to the Site which include:

- enhanced landscaping along Main Street West (i.e. large canopy trees within the public realm, trees in planters situated between the front building facade and public sidewalk, ornamental planters located along the building facades, patio furniture/seating, and enhanced decorative paving stones); and
- design elements to minimize the impacts of wind on the streetscape (i.e. podium definition, stepbacks, and tower separation are effective strategies to reduce the impact of downwashing wind flows at the ground level).

Reference can be made to the Landscape Concept Plan prepared by GSP Group Inc. dated October 8, 2020 for additional details.

Although the proposed building appears as a large mass when viewed from the oblique views, design elements such as the 4th storey skyways and tower separation open up the sky views when viewed more perpendicular. The visual impacts of the proposed building therefore pass quickly as you move to a position more perpendicular to the building or further away which results in the building appearing as 1 mass as discussed on the previous page. In addition, the aforementioned design measures and streetscape improvements along Main Street West will help to mitigate the negative impacts resulting from the loss of skyviews along Main Street West and help facilitate a pedestrian-friendly streetscape. For these reasons, the proposed additional height is appropriate, subject to ensuring these pedestrian amenities and design elements are implemented along Main Street West.

### **c. Rifle Range Road / Ewen Road Streetscapes and Sky Views**

When viewed from Ewen Road (**Views 2, 3, 12, and 14**), the effect of the 25 m separation distances, gradual transition in tower height down from Tower C to A, and the building mass connecting the towers are noticeable in this view and demonstrate how these elements contribute to maximizing views to the sky when viewed from the residential area to the south and north. The design features mentioned above have been incorporated in order to break up the massing, provide views through the building via the 4th-storey skyway, and to increase sky views.

From Rifle Range Road looking north, only Towers B and C are visible from **View 4** as the existing Mondelez facility completely obstructs Tower A and partially obstructs Tower B. This view demonstrates that the separation distance between these towers plus the gradation in height from Tower C to B reduces the overall bulk of the building and facilitates views of the sky. **View 5** illustrates how the large public boulevard between the Site's eastern lot line and the sidewalk aids in maximizing sky views sunlight on the public sidewalk.

## 6. Summary and Conclusions

Based on the analysis above, it is our opinion that the visual impacts as a result of the proposed development are appropriate and reasonable and the following conclusions can be made:

- The existing views the Niagara Escarpment located both north and south of Site will be maintained while recognizing that a building constructed under the as-of-right zoning permissions (3-storeys) would obstruct a limited number of views of the Escarpment looking south from the residential area located north of Main Street West and therefore the impacts are appropriate;
- When viewed from longer perspectives from both the east and west along the Main Street West corridor, the proposed building appears as 1 mass rather than 3 separate towers when viewed from the short side of the development, minimizing the visual impact of the proposed development;
- When viewed from the interior of the residential areas located north and south of the Site, the proposed building will be visible but will not be overpowering due to design elements such as the proposed tower separation and 4th-storey skyways, all of which allow for additional skyviews;
- When viewed from pedestrian level along the Main Street West streetscape directly east and west of the Site, the proposed development appears as one large mass as the 4th-storey skyways are not visible and the tower separation is not prominent due to the overlapping of the towers. However, a number of design elements and streetscape improvements are proposed which will help to mitigate the negative impacts resulting from the loss of skyviews along Main Street West and help facilitate a pedestrian-friendly streetscape. For these reasons, the proposed additional height is reasonable and appropriate, subject to ensuring the proposed pedestrian amenities and design elements are implemented through the Site Plan Approval stage along the Main Street West streetscape;

Respectfully,

  
Kevin Muir, MCIP, RPP  
Senior Planner

  
Ashley Paton, B.U.R.PI, MCIP, RPP  
Planner/Urban Designer

# Figures



Proposed Building View 1  
Looking East along Main St at Osler Dr  
Source: McCallum Sather (July 2020); GSP Group (August 2020)

Figure  
**1**

2 Existing



Proposed



Proposed Building View 2  
Looking North along Ewen Rd at Ofield Rd  
Source: McCallum Sather (July 2020); GSP Group (August 2020)

Figure  
2

3 Existing



Proposed



Proposed Building View 3  
Looking North along Ewen Rd  
Source: McCallum Sather (July 2020); GSP Group (August 2020)

Figure  
3

4 Existing



Proposed



Proposed Building View 4  
Looking North along Rifle Range Rd  
Source: McCallum Sather (July 2020); GSP Group (August 2020)

Figure  
4

5 Existing



Proposed



Proposed Building View 5  
Looking North along Rifle Range Rd  
Source: McCallum Sather (July 2020); GSP Group (August 2020)

Figure  
5

6 Existing



Proposed



Proposed Building View 6  
Looking East along Main St at Ewen Rd  
Source: McCallum Sather (July 2020); GSP Group (August 2020)

Figure  
6

7 Existing



Proposed



Proposed Building View 7  
Looking South along West Park Ave at Main St  
Source: McCallum Sather (July 2020); GSP Group (August 2020)

Figure  
7



Proposed Building View 8  
Looking South along Westbourne Rd  
Source: McCallum Sather (July 2020); GSP Group (August 2020)

Figure  
8

9 Existing



Proposed



Proposed Building View 9  
Looking West along Main at Westbourne Rd  
Source: McCallum Sather (July 2020); GSP Group (August 2020)

Figure  
9



Proposed Building View 10  
 Looking South along Rifle Range Rd at Main St  
 Source: McCallum Sather (July 2020); GSP Group (August 2020)

Figure  
**10**

11 Existing



Proposed



Proposed Building View 11  
Looking West along Main St at Norfolk St  
Source: McCallum Sather (July 2020); GSP Group (August 2020)

Figure  
**11**

12 Existing



Proposed



Proposed Building View 12  
Looking North along Ewen Rd  
Source: McCallum Sather (July 2020); GSP Group (August 2020)

Figure  
**12**



Proposed Building View 1  
Looking East along Main St

Source: McCallum Sather (July 2020); GSP Group (August 2020)

Figure  
**13**

14 Existing



Proposed



Proposed Building View 1  
Looking South along Ewen Rd  
Source: McCallum Sather (July 2020); GSP Group (August 2020)

Figure  
**14**

**A** Existing



Proposed



Proposed Building Vista A  
Looking North at Highway 403  
Source: McCallum Sather (July 2020); GSP Group (August 2020)

View  
**15**