



## MEMORANDUM

**TO:** MARIA LASDAY, VILLAGE ADMINISTRATOR  
**FROM:** JOHN HOUSEAL, AICP  
PRINCIPAL  
**DATE:** JANUARY 15, 2008  
**RE:** HIGHWOOD TOWERS PLANNED DEVELOPMENT  
PRELIMINARY PLAN REVIEW

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Houseal Lavigne Associates has conducted a review of the Highwood Towers Planned Development application. Our review includes submitted materials referred to as the Highwood Tower Preliminary Development Plans, and focuses on site planning and development aspects of the project. The Subject Property is located at 700 N. Sheridan Road, on the west side of Sheridan Road at the intersection of Sheridan Road and 1st Avenue. Our comments relate to planning, land use, site design, parking and circulation, and proposed structures.

Overall the proposed development is a positive addition to the Village and should help improve the image, appearance, and overall character of this section of the Village. However, some adjustments to the proposed development should be considered.

Our report includes the following sections:

1. Site Conditions and Surrounding Land Use
2. Proposed Use
3. Parking and Circulation
4. Building and Site Improvements
5. Landscaping Improvements
6. Lighting
7. Signage

## **1. SITE CONDITIONS AND SURROUNDING LAND USE**

The Subject Property has an area of approximately 3.84 acres and has approximately 430' of frontage along Sheridan Road. The Subject Property is currently improved with a vacant 5-story hotel, banquet facility, and parking lot. The Subject Property is bounded to the north by public owned property (park), to the south by multi-family residential property, to the west by publicly owned property (Village water tower site and the railroad tracks), and to the east across Sheridan Road by residential land uses and active Fort Sheridan Military Base uses.

## **2. PROPOSED USE**

The concept of a commercial/residential mixed-use development is appropriate for the Subject Property and appropriate for this location within the Village. Generally, the market in the area supports both the amount and size of the proposed commercial space and the number and size of residential units. The proposed residential unit sizes extend from the small to the more typical market sizes. Units range from approximately 826 square feet to 1,912 square feet. This range of sizes provides a viable mix of units that should do well in the market, and for which there is demand within the greater Highwood area. The provision to limit the number of rental units versus owner occupied units is also a very sound approach to maintaining market viability, long term value and quality of the development, and providing the needed diversity of new residential housing options.

## **3. PARKING AND CIRCULATION**

### ***Parking***

The proposed development has sufficient off-street parking for the proposed residential and commercial components.

The proposed surface parking for the retail uses is conveniently located and should work well. The enclosed parking spaces designated for commercial uses should provide sufficient parking for more destination oriented commercial uses, likely to require longer stays on site. All employees should be required to park in the designated enclosed parking areas, therefore reserving the surface parking for retail customers.

The proposed residential parking is more than adequate to accommodate the number and size of the residential units. Two enclosed parking spaces are provided for each residential unit and additional surface parking west of the building is provided for visitors. Together, the surface and enclosed parking areas provide sufficient parking for both the commercial and residential uses.

Overall, the parking is laid out and designed in a manner that will facilitate the location of the residential and business uses. The site plan provides convenient parking for the commercial uses along the east side of the building, residential/visitor parking areas along the west side of the building, and some drop-off/pick-up/short-term parking spaces along the north and south sides of the building near the lobbies. In addition to these primary parking areas, the applicant is proposing surface parking near the southeast corner of the site in a separate, but connected, parking lot that provides through access and connection to the adjacent use to the south.

In addition to the surface parking outlined above, the proposed development provides structured parking on four levels – below grade, mezzanine, first floor, and second floor levels. This structured parking is integrated well into the building and has no visual presence on the east façade, and relatively little presence along the north and south facades. A development of this size with this mix of uses often struggles to integrate a sufficient amount of parking in an appropriate manner. As proposed, this development provides well designed parking in sufficient number for the residential and commercial uses.

From the plans available for our review, it appears that the dimensions for the proposed surface lot parking and driving aisles are sufficient. Although some of the structured parking spaces are not 9' in width, parking space widths of 8.5' are very viable and considered standard in many contemporary developments. Wherever possible, parking spaces should be a minimum of 8.5' wide and a minimum of 18' in length.

### **Circulation**

Overall, the proposed on-site circulation is sound. It provides easy access to all parking areas and accommodates convenient circulation throughout the site.

The location of the northernmost driveway along Sheridan Road remains the same as the existing driveway. However, although the southernmost driveway is partially in the same location as the existing driveway, the new wider driveway may need to be shifted slightly to the south to align more directly with 1<sup>st</sup> Avenue. Any offset between the driveway and 1<sup>st</sup> Street should be eliminated and an aligned intersection should be provided. (Note: Although the site plan does not show the location of 1<sup>st</sup> Avenue, the alignment appears to be an issue based on the overlay of the site plan onto the aerial photograph of the area.)

The applicant is proposing to maintain the existing easement access to the adjacent property to the south. Such cross access is highly desirable. The applicant is also indicating how access would be provided to the Village's water tower and the proposed new playground area on the north. Access to both of these public facilities is not hindered by the proposed Highwood Tower Planned Development.

Pedestrian circulation is accommodated on all sides of the building, and particularly well on the east, north, and south sides. The retail frontage is served by large sidewalks and the areas near the lobbies provide ample room for pedestrians who may be coming, or going, or gather just outside the lobbies.

Better pedestrian connections are needed in a few areas: 1a) A better pedestrian connection should be provided to the playground area to the north. This could be accommodated by connecting the sidewalk at the northwest corner of the building to the playground area (not just the grass area) and on north to the public sidewalk and 1b) installing another sidewalk that runs from the lobby area along the north side of the building due north and extending along the south side of the playground parking area, ultimately connecting to the playground; and 2) a better connection should be provided from the Sheridan Road sidewalk to the retail storefronts by running a sidewalk along one or both sides of both the north and south driveways, connecting to the sidewalk in front of the building.

Designated pedestrian crosswalks should be provided at key locations in front of the retail shops and elsewhere throughout the site. Designated pedestrian crosswalks should be marked with changes in pavement material and colors, striping, signage, bollard lighting, and other design features. It is important to emphasize the pedestrian in these areas of high potential for vehicle/pedestrian conflict.

### ***Loading Areas***

Overall, the proposed number and location of loading areas is appropriate to accommodate the proposed development.

## **4. BUILDING & SITE IMPROVEMENTS**

Overall, the proposed buildings will be an improvement over the appearance and function of the existing buildings on site. As a note, the applicant must specify the building materials to be used on the building. The drawings submitted for review did not identify building materials.

### ***Building Materials***

The building materials are very important to the overall character and quality of the proposed development. Brick and stone should be the primary building materials. Use of EIFS (exterior insulation finish systems, DryVit) should not be permitted. Although potentially appropriate for small accent areas on the upper floor, the use of EIFS should be discouraged or not allowed.

The window tinting/glazing is also very important, especially for the retail uses along Sheridan Road. Reflective glass of any kind in the commercial areas should be prohibited. Windows with very slight tinting may be appropriate on the upper floors, but is not encouraged.

Again, the applicant should provide building material samples of all exterior components of the building prior to final approval.

### ***Setbacks***

Given the location of the Subject Property and the surrounding uses, the proposed setbacks are appropriate. The requirements that the building setbacks equal the height of the building are not appropriate for this development. It is also appropriate that parking be permitted in the required front and side yard setbacks. The setbacks, as proposed, provide a building and parking lot location that "reads" well from adjacent properties, provides an appropriate distance to the retail shops from Sheridan Road, and accommodates convenient and safe access and circulation to all areas of the site.

### ***Architectural Elevations***

Overall, the building is attractive and well planned for the site. The building is broken into two taller 7-story residential components connected by a central 3-story portion. By dividing the mass of the building into two distinct taller areas, the building provides better proportion, light and air, and more attractive elevations than if it were one single building mass located in the center of the site. Further, the "stepping back" of the façade at the different levels softens and further mitigates the overall visual bulk of the building and contributes to its more interesting, attractive, and visually distinctive elevations. However, although this building is an improvement over the appearance and quality as it exists today, there are some items that should be further addressed and considered for revision. Canopy trees should be a primary portion of the landscape plan to mitigate views and reduce massing of the building, especially from the north.

### **HVAC Screening**

The applicant should provide a roof plan and line of sight drawing to show that the roof-top mounted HVAC equipment is screened from vehicular and pedestrian traffic on the site, adjacent properties, and adjacent rights-of-way.

### **Balconies**

As proposed, and as viewed from the east and west, the balconies project several feet from the exterior wall of the building. Balconies with such projections tend to have an appearance of being “stuck on” rather than being integrated into the building. As viewed from the north and south, the balconies do not project beyond the exterior walls of the building and appear to be better integrated into the building. The applicant should consider reducing the depth of the balconies to be flush with the exterior walls or consider curving the balcony overhangs/railings for start at the exterior wall, curve out, and then return to the exterior wall, rather than simply projecting straight out. This may seem like a minor point, but integrated balconies will significantly improve the appearance of the development. Additionally, the covenants should prohibit storage on balconies to prevent clutter that is unsightly.

## **5. LANDSCAPING IMPROVEMENTS**

No landscape plan was provided as part of the application packet of materials. The applicant should submit a detailed landscape plan indicating the location and type of all landscape and hardscape improvements to be included in the development. Landscaping is one of the most important considerations for any development and should include at a minimum, parkway trees, perimeter parking lot screening, foundation plantings, parking lot islands, and other site landscaping. Shade trees, ornamental trees, flowering shrubs, decorative ground cover, evergreens, planters, and other materials should all be incorporated into an attractive landscape plan for the development. Identification of all paving materials should also be indicated, including brick pavers or other materials for pedestrian crosswalks or gathering places. Specifically, the landscape plan should include large shade and evergreen trees within the park site north of the subject property and along the Sheridan Road frontage of the park site.

## **6. LIGHTING**

No lighting plan/photometric study was provided as part of the application packet of materials. The applicant should submit a plan indicating the location and type of lighting fixtures to be used in the project, including all building mounted lighting and site and parking lot lighting. The proposed lighting/photometric plan should also indicate the level of illumination throughout the Subject Property.

## **7. SIGNAGE**

No signage plan was provided as part of the application packet of materials. The applicant should submit a detailed signage plan indicating the location and type of all signs within the development, including building signage, site/monument signage, wayfinding, and more. It is important that the proposed signage be compatible in scale, location, proportion, and design to the overall look and character of the building.