

February 2023

City of Ottawa

Committee of Adjustments

Ben Franklin Place, 4th Floor

Ottawa, On K2G 5K7

Committee of Adjustment
Received | Reçu le

2023-03-01

City of Ottawa | Ville d'Ottawa
Comité de dérogation

RE: 106 Prince Albert Street – Semi-detached home

This application is seeking approval for a consent and two minor variances that would separate our property at 106 Prince Albert which is in an R3M zone, into two lots in order to create a semi-detached family home.

The minor variances requested for both severed and retained lots:

- *To permit the garage to be 0.6m closer to the lot line than the principal entrance*
- *To permit a building height of 8.9 m where the by-law requires 8m*

The official plan calls for more growth by intensification within our urban boundary. As a result of this and its proximity to the downtown core, the neighbourhood of Overbrook is evolving into a more inclusive, denser, and vibrant neighbourhood. It is well situated to be a perfect 15-minute neighbourhood; it is close to greenspace (the Rideau River and Riverain park to the west, as well as Overbrook Park and Gil O Julien Park, both of which are within walking distance). The neighbourhood is surrounded by public transit options, as it is situated between Lee's and St-Laurent LRT stations. Furthermore, multiple arterial roads such as Donald, Vanier Parkway and St-Laurent are major public transit routes are all within walking distance. It is also close to many services and amenities that make this area perfect for more density.

We have designed a sustainable, highly-energy efficient, fossil-fuel-free home, that we think is an exemplary model of new development for this neighbourhood. Due to numerous mitigating factors; our modestly scaled semi-detached home is suitable for the neighbourhood and will provide much needed housing options for larger households. This is a purpose-built custom semi for two young families, which includes one secondary basement dwelling which would provide additional housing for others.

The original intent was to design this house to not require any height variances. However, due to the rear dormer slope, and how maximum building height is calculated, a small increase in height was required. The original design made use of a reverse grade driveway to keep the overall building lower in reference to average grade. However, later in the design process, it was brought to our attention by City Planning and Infrastructure staff that our property is located in a large, depressed area, as well as close to a large neighbourhood catch basin. As a result, a reverse grade driveway would not be permitted, and it was necessary to bring the entire house up by the minimum height required to create a positively sloped driveway to avoid any risk of flooding. Therefore, we need a permitted height of 8.9m whereas the by-law permits 8m. Attached to this letter are a series of mitigating factors as well as our drawing package to show that the impact on height is minor.

The biggest factor to consider is that our main roof, which constitutes the highest peak on the site is complying fully within the 8m height envelope (*height calculated at 7.6m*). Because of the sloped nature of this roof, its front eave creates a strong roof line which is much lower and a visual datum which is more in line with a one storey building (*see diagram on page 10 of our drawing package*). The second storey of the house was designed in such a way to be hidden within the roof structure to mitigate the height. However, the maximum height is calculated from the midpoint of the highest dormer, which is at the rear of the property, and abuts a four-storey apartment block, a 6-storey and 15-storey condo building. The rear dormer is a single sloped shed roof which is in line with the height of neighbouring buildings and dwarfed by the taller buildings our property abuts.

Where additional height is required on the front dormer, it is a sloped roof and concentrated towards the center of the site to mitigate any impact this additional height could have of the neighbouring properties. The eaves on this dormer, like the main roof, extend down below the maximum building height.

It is also important to consider the context. As mentioned, the rear of the property abuts multiple mid to high-rise buildings ranging from a four-storey apartment building directly behind the property to a 6 and 15 storey condo building on rear diagonal lots. The front of the building is also facing taller buildings. Directly across, there is a 10m tall flat-roofed three-unit wide townhouse currently under construction. Although it is a slightly different building typology, it is not much wider than a semi-detached yet is permitted to be 2m taller. Our proposal is also providing 3 units yet are limited to 8m. Furthermore, the flat roof of the building across the street makes it appear to be even taller compared to our sensitive, sloped roof design. There are other examples of taller buildings on this street and scattered throughout the neighbourhood that we have documented (*see diagram on page 16 of our drawing package*) to show that our minor height increase has no impact of the fabric of the existing neighbourhood.

Our variance for height creates no additional privacy concerns as the height of the windows in this scheme vs. a complying scheme could be at the same elevation. There are no windows in our design overlooking neighbour's private spaces.

Because the main body of our roof is complying within the height envelope, our minor variance for height has no impact on any shadows that could be cast on its surrounding. It is also a sloped roof so the sun angle is not a factor like it would be if we were pursuing a flat-roof design.

The second minor variance we require is to permit the garage to be 0.6m closer to the front lot line than our principal entrance. Our garage door is setback 1.7m (5.6') from the front of our porch however, our porch falls within a required yard which means we do not comply. We believe the intent of this by-law is to encourage design which is not focused on the garage being the focal point of the front façade and we strongly agree with that. The architectural design of this house is far from a suburban semi-detached house dominated by a front facing garage. Although our garage wall is in line with the main façade of the house, we have taken multiple steps to mitigate its presence on the urban fabric.

The main living spaces of the house were organized in a large architectural feature facing the street. Having our main living room in this location creates “eyes on the street” which is an element heavily encouraged in the official plan as desirable urban design (*see diagram on page 12 of our drawing package*). This large frame on the upper portion of the house also becomes the main focal point on the façade and mitigates the presence of the garage on the street. Created using a permitted projection, it is proud of the garage door, creating the illusion that the garage door is further setback from the main façade of the house. Dark materials were used below the main living level of the house, to make it the garage doors “disappear”.

Another element which creates visual separation from the garage to the street is a large contemporary front porch. It is proud of the front face of the house by 1.8m as is heavily landscaped to create a soft buffer. We used a glass door at the front to show some activity in the house. This sets up a meaningful entrance experience, which is another visual draw, taking importance away from the garage.

With the use of these sensitive architectural solutions, we were able to reclaim the space above the garage and transform it into living space facing the street. In our opinion, this is actually more in line with what the by-law intends than what other conforming properties are doing in this neighbourhood. A perfect example is the semi-detached at 110 Prince Albert directly to the east. Even though the garage is conforming as per the by-law, we feel it dominates the front façade of the house. Because of the height envelope, the garage at 110 Prince Albert is a double height space that goes all the way to the underside of the second floor. This common design leads to a garage that consumes the entire front half of the ground floor plan and forces a narrow, lowered entrance at the front and all the living space towards the back of the property completely disconnecting the resident from the front of the street.

That said, we believe the four tests are met. The variances are minor in nature and would allow for a modest semi-detached family oriented, ecologically friendly house that is not only appropriate but desirable for this neighbourhood. More and more urban homes are being constructed in this neighbourhood and we believe that strong examples are needed going forward. As a result, more families are closer to the core and public transit which maintains the intent of the official plan. The general intent of the zoning is being maintained, the development we are proposing is suitable for an urban neighbourhood of this density.

We have circulated our design package to neighbours, the community association as well as the Councillor's office and we have had a positive response. I believe that this letter demonstrates that the four tests have been carefully considered and addressed for this application.

Sincerely,

Hugo Latreille