# 12. BUILT FORM, HEIGHT AND CHARACTER

## ISSUES

How best should the built form respond to the overall built form of the downtown peninsula (now and in the future); waterfront scale; need for sun penetration on open spaces, and internal livability issues such as noise, privacy and private views? Built form must also be guided by considerations of preservation of public and adjacent private views, as well as views to landmarks such as the Marine Building and the Canada Place 'sails'. How should these factors be balanced?

For the residential area, what types of buildings are appropriate? How will the blocks be divided up into sub-components (buildings) to ensure an appropriate degree of comfort, identity, safety, and security for residents?

What general and maximum building heights are appropriate to meet views and other livability objectives? What should be the height limits and distributions? In particular what heights and forms are appropriate near the water?

The datum for measuring heights in the Marathon site is proposed to be an official established building grade linking the top of the escarpment and a new base rather than the existing base level 101. Is this appropriate?

Given the size of the developments, it is probable that various parcels will be sold or leased to other developers to build. What degree of uniformity versus diversity is desirable between individual developments in terms of massing and character?

Much of the sense of place in the area will be created by the design and treatment of the streetscape and the bases of buildings. A major complicating factor will be the handling and integration of the new 'artificial' base surface and grade transitions. Should the development as a whole have a special streetscape treatment? Should it be a single theme or be changed in various areas? To what degree should it relate to the overall treatments in upland areas? How will awkward grade changes be avoided? How will full handicapped access be assured? How will the constraints placed on landscaping by the artificial base surface be dealt with?

To what extent should the proposed built form and landscaping treatment of Georgia Street and existing character of Stanley Park be carried through to the new developments adjacent at the westerly part of Coal Harbour?

## FACTS

Orientation to key views and amenities is in the opposite direction as compared to sun access. Water and mountain views are to the north. Sun shines from the south. This means that the most valuable public and private open spaces will tend to be shadowed.

Building heights are usually measured from the 'base surface' of a site rather than an 'assumed' base grade. Generally, parking above the base surface on a site is included in density calculations.

The height of existing towers in the adjacent Downtown District range from 300 to 450 feet measured from their real grade at the top of the escarpment at least 10 - 40 feet above the Marathon site. However, the tallest downtown building immediately adjacent to the site is the Marine Building at 330 ft. in height.

There is a virtual 'wall' of closely spaced buildings on the north side of Hastings between Burrard and Bute which face the Marathon site. These buildings are built to average densities between 9.0 and 12.0 FSR.

The development west of Bute to Cardero is less dense, with potential development sites having a maximum allowable density of 6.0 FSR.

The height of the existing Bayshore tower is 180 ft. and the towers proposed adjacent to the Bayshore site in the West End area along the southside of Georgia Street are zoned to a maximum of 190 feet.

The escarpment drop varies from about 10 to 40 feet between the existing city at the top of the Coal Harbour lands and the water level, with the maximum difference at the eastern end of the site.

## PAST POLICY

### 1979 CWD ODP:

- Scale transition from existing buildings, generally decreasing towards the water; location, height and massing should minimize noon-hour shadowing.
- The Cardero to Bute sub-area should be medium and low rise structures not exceeding 120 feet, relaxable to 300 feet upon consideration of overshadowing, views, and related environmental criteria. Development north of the Downtown in the Bute/Burrard sub-area should act as the physical scale transition from the office high-rise to the water with building heights to 230 feet, also relaxable to 300 feet.

### OTHER:

- High density residential buildings in the inner-city are generally required to satisfy a range of livability criteria, including a minimum separation between 'facing' towers of 80 feet. Additional livability factors come into play if children are targeted for the development.

## POLICY

### BUILT FORM

**Ensure building massing:**

- contributes to street edge definition, through 'street wall' buildings particularly on north-south streets and along the waterfront promenade. Shape street walls to provide ample, hospitable public streetscapes with landscaping, allow gaps for views through and sun access to open spaces, and have some setback from the property line to accommodate landscaping and semi-private open spaces.

- allows some views north through blocks from street level, breaking continuity of east-west street edges as necessary.
- maximizes sun exposure to the waterfront walkway and public open spaces during the high use periods -- mid-day for office workers, late afternoon for residents.
- allows some sun penetration to semi-private and private open spaces during high use periods.
- can be broken down into individual buildings of reasonable size (in terms of number of units, etc.).
- creates a comfortable low to mid-rise environment along the public waterfront.
- balances creation of private views for new buildings with preservation of views for existing and likely future buildings to the south.
- spaces high buildings carefully in relation to adjacent downtown towers to maximize separation and view protection from the south.
- allows opportunity for the semi-private outdoor amenity spaces needed by the various types of user groups including resident adults, children, and office workers.
- configures and locates towers to fit into the overall built form of Downtown/West End, particularly respecting transition of heights from the downtown core toward north and west, and the typical overlapping of towers as seen from a distance.
- avoids overly bulky office buildings and provides slimming as height increases.
- uses building tops to provide interest and character to the city skyline, but has respect for the landmark buildings already there.

For tall buildings on this waterfront site, require comprehensive wind studies to ensure that potential downdraft wind conditions are mitigated and nearby public open spaces meet acceptable criteria.

Allow parking development below the new base surfaces to be exempt from FSR.

Ensure development patterns and guidelines foster safety and security.

## HEIGHT

**Regulate heights generally as follows:**

- allow building heights to be measured from new artificial base surfaces, but require very careful consideration and agreement on the configuration of these base surfaces to ensure gradual transitions to the waterfront.
- require 'street wall' buildings to be at least 35 feet in height except in areas where views would be impacted.
- in the Bayshore site (Denman to Cardero) adjacent to the park and the waterfront, allow a mix of low and medium rise buildings up to 120 ft. Adjacent to Georgia Street and other internal locations and subject to careful evaluation of building massing objectives, allow some towers up to a maximum of 190 ft.
- in the existing CWD Sub-area 1 (Cardero to Bute), allow a mix of low and medium rise buildings up to 120 ft. Subject to careful evaluation of building massing objectives, allow some towers up to a maximum of 230 feet with a possible increase to 300 feet between Broughton and Bute.
- in the existing CWD Sub-area 2 (Bute to Burrard), allow a mix of low and medium rise buildings up to 120 ft. Subject to evaluation of building massing objectives, allow some towers up to a maximum of 300 feet.
- generally locate the higher towers towards the southern edge of the site, away from the water's edge.

## CHARACTER

Develop guidelines to deal with a high degree of coordination required of potential separate developers.

Develop a high quality streetscape and building base treatment that provides for urban design continuity and coherency; long term maintenance; visual interest and character area definition; appropriate, feasible landscape; and full access for the disabled.

Develop a domestic street edge character and small-scaled residential ambience for the residential neighbourhood west of Thurlow Street. This should especially include locating as many entry doors to individual units as possible directly onto the street, so as to provide both 'eyes on the street' and a sense of neighbourhood.

Ensure that the commercial ambience of the retail development at the westerly end of the site reflects a marine character appropriate to the variety of adjacent waterfront uses, and reinforces the atmosphere of the working small boat harbour.

Ensure the built form at the westerly end of the Bayshore site responds to the park atmosphere adjacent and the emerging 'gateway' character along Georgia Street.

Ensure that open spaces are positively shaped as imageable places rather than simply being left over after building design has been determined. Also ensure and that the edges around public open spaces are animated and add to the character of the area.