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MEMORANDUM

June 17, 2009

TO: Mayor and Council

CC: Penny Bellam, City Manager
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FROM: Jessica Chen, Senior Planner - Central Area Planning (Downtown Eastside)

SUBJECT: Historic Area Height Review - Update on Public Consultation and Next Steps

This memo provides Council with an update on the Historic Area Height Review ("Height Review") currently underway, including a summary of the public consultation process recently undertaken and a review of next steps.

Background

The Height Review is being conducted to explore opportunities for additional height and density in the Historic Area (the neighbourhoods of Gastown, Chinatown, Victory Square, and Hastings Street from Richards to Gore).

The question of additional height is one which needs to be addressed in order to complete the draft Chinatown Community Plan we are preparing, as well as to inform staff response to rezoning enquiries for taller buildings in the Historic Area. In June 2008, Council also requested that staff undertake this work in EcoDensity Action B-1, which says:

“That Staff be directed to include consideration of policies for additional density and corresponding height in suitable locations in Gastown, Hastings, Chinatown, and Victory Square, as part of the Historic Precinct Height Study (“the Study”). The intent of this direction is to support heritage conservation projects, to provide replacement low-income housing, and/or to support other public benefits and amenities. Suitable, carefully considered locations, densities and heights will be determined through careful analysis and extensive public consultation to ensure the appropriate scale in the historic areas is maintained, while also being consistent with the City’s housing objectives for the area.”

As a result of this Council direction, staff undertook detailed technical analysis of height and density in the Historic Area and sought the input of several external consultants. The following objectives have guided the study and will inform future recommendations:

- to provide direction for growth and development in the Historic Area;
- to maintain the Historic Area’s character and general building scale; and,
- to ensure significant new development potential that may result from this study generates public benefits and amenities for the area, such as affordable housing, heritage conservation, social and cultural facilities.

The following ideas were presented by staff to initiate and frame the discussion for public consultation on the concept of additional height and density in the Historic Area:

- Maintain maximum height limits in current zoning regulations (*General Height - Option 1*)
- Allow a moderate increase in height through rezoning (*General Height - Option 2*)
- Consider possible roles and heights for taller buildings (*Special Sites*)

A variety of materials were developed to support the Height Review public consultation, including PowerPoint presentations, display boards, visualization tools (3D modelling, hand-renderings), and a website. In partnership with the UBC School of Architecture, a physical model for the study area was also built and displayed at open houses to assist with the public’s understanding of scale and massing. Detailed information on the ideas presented for discussion can be found online at the following link: <http://vancouver.ca/hahr>

Public Consultation Process

Overview

Throughout April and May 2009 staff undertook an extensive public consultation process on the Height Review. The purpose of this consultation was to seek public feedback on the ideas presented for discussion. Specifically, people were asked to comment on the objectives of the study, General Height options, and the concept of Special Sites, including the role, possible heights, and numbers of taller buildings appropriate for the Historic Area.

The consultation process included meetings with City advisory bodies, community committees and groups, as well as public workshops and open houses. A Council briefing was also held on May 25, 2009. Through this consultation, staff presented and discussed the Height Review at over 15 meetings of City advisory bodies and community groups, and held 3 public workshops and 2 open houses. Notification of the public workshops and open houses was done through

multiple advertisements in community newspapers, including two Chinese language papers, as well as sharing information through community group networks. Approximately 250 participants attended the workshops and open houses, representing a mix of people that live and work in the Downtown Eastside and elsewhere in Vancouver. A summary of the public consultation meetings that were held is attached.

Feedback from the public was received in a number of ways, including feedback forms (distributed at the workshops and open houses), facilitator notes from round table discussions held at workshops, meeting minutes, formal statements, and written comments submitted by email. In addition, there has been a significant amount of media coverage of the Height Review and subsequent online discussion. Staff are still receiving comments and will continue to be available to the community and media to discuss the Height Review until the end of July.

Chinatown Community Outreach

As part of the Height Review consultation additional outreach was done with the Chinese community as the feedback received will inform the draft Chinatown Community Plan currently being prepared. Due to limited resources, full translation of materials into Chinese was not possible, however bilingual staff were present at all meetings and events, and special effort was made to meet with as many Chinese community groups as possible. Some presentations and discussions at the community meetings were conducted entirely in Chinese - both Mandarin and Cantonese. In addition, significant outreach to the Chinese media was undertaken and a bilingual fact sheet has been prepared and is being distributed. As a result, there was a good representation of the Chinese community at the community group meetings, public workshops and open houses.

The focus of many comments from the Chinese community was on the concept of the Chinese Cultural Centre as a “Special Site”. The notion of a taller building in this location has been very controversial in the community and led to significant media coverage on the issue of height in Chinatown.

Low-income Community Outreach

In addition to the Chinese community, special effort was also made to outreach to the low-income community. This included consulting with low-income community representatives regarding the consultation process and logistics as they were being developed. In addition, a town hall meeting was held at the Carnegie Community Centre, organized by the Carnegie Community Action Project and moderated by the Downtown Eastside Residents Association. The community recorded this meeting and it is being broadcast online and on television by *Fearless TV*. Workshops and open houses were promoted at the town hall event, and they were held in accessible locations within the community.

Comments made by the low-income community mostly related to the relevance of the Height Review to planning for the future of the DTES, concerns regarding market development being used to leverage public benefits, and the impacts this type of development would have on the low-income community.

Preliminary Findings

Staff are currently reviewing and analyzing the feedback received from the consultation process, which includes a significant amount of qualitative feedback. Early analysis of the feedback received shows that the majority of people who provided comments, including members of the public and professionals serving on City advisory bodies, do not support the notion of Special Sites, while there are mixed views on General Heights with some tolerance for a moderate increase in some sub-areas of the Historic Area.

Next Steps

At the outset of public consultation, staff anticipated reporting to Council with recommendations in July 2009. Due to the significant community interest shown and the amount of feedback received, additional time for review is required thus staff will report to Council this Fall with a summary and recommended actions. We will inform the public and community groups of the revised report timing.

I trust that this update on the Height Review has been helpful. Please contact me, or my colleague Tanis Knowles from the Downtown Eastside Planning Team at 604.871.6077 or tanis.knowles@vancouver.ca, if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

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Historic Area Height Review: Summary of Public Consultation Meetings Held in April and May 2009

Council Advisory Body Meetings

April 14	Chinatown Historic Area Planning Committee (CHAPC)
April 15	Gastown Historic Area Planning Committee (GHAPC)
April 22	Vancouver City Planning Commission (VCPC)
April 22	Urban Design Panel (UDP)
April 22	Vancouver Heritage Commission (VHC)
May 4	Vancouver Heritage Commission (VHC)
May 12	Chinatown Historic Area Planning Committee (CHAPC)
May 20	Gastown Business Improvement Society (GBIS)
May 20	Gastown Historic Area Planning Committee (GHAPC)

Community Group Meetings

April 16	Vancouver Chinatown Revitalization Committee (VCRC)
April 20	Urban Development Institute (UDI)
April 21	Chinatown Society Heritage Buildings Association (CSHBA)
April 27	Carnegie Centre Town Hall - organized by the Carnegie Community Action Project (CCAP) and moderated by the Downtown Eastside Residents Association (DERA)
May 16	Chinese Cultural Centre Board (CCC)
May 20	Vancouver Second Mile Society Seniors Centre
May 21	Heritage Vancouver Society

Public Workshops and Open Houses

April 23	Workshop 1 (held at the Chinese Cultural Centre)
April 28	Workshop 2 (held at the Chinese Cultural Centre)
April 30	Workshop 3 (held at Jenny Pentland Place)
May 3	Open House 1 (held at the Interurban Gallery)
May 4	Open House 2 (held at the Interurban Gallery)