

URBAN DESIGN PANEL MINUTES

DATE: November 16, 2016

TIME: 4:00 pm

PLACE: Town Hall Meeting Room, Vancouver City Hall

PRESENT: Neal Lamontagne (excused for item #1)
Stefan Aepli
Veronica Gillies (excused for item #1)
Ken Larsson (excused for item #1)
Muneesh Sharma
Roger Hughes
David Jerke
Russell Acton
Meghan Cree-Smith

REGRETS: James Cheng
Kim Smith
Karen Spoelstra
Meredith Anderson

**RECORDING
SECRETARY:** Camilla Lade

ITEMS REVIEWED AT THIS MEETING

- | | |
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| 1. | 3681 Victoria Drive & 1915 Stainsbury Avenue |
| 2. | 800 Robson Street (Robson Square) |
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BUSINESS MEETING

Chair Roger Hughes called the meeting to order at 4:00 p.m. and noted the presence of a quorum. After a brief business meeting the panel considered applications as scheduled for presentation.

1. Address: 3681 Victoria Drive & 1915 Stainsbury Avenue
 DE: RZ-2016-00020
 Description: The proposal is for a six-storey mixed-use building with a total of 149 secured market rental units (including five live-work units) over one level of underground parking, (including 110 residential vehicle parking spaces, one Class B loading space, 194 Class A bicycle spaces and six Class B bicycle spaces), with a floor area of 10,118.3 m² (108,912 sq. ft.), a floor space ratio (FSR) of 2.45, and a building height of 18.5 m (60.67 ft.). This application is being considered under the Secured Market Rental Housing (Rental 100) Program.
 Zoning: MC-1 to CD-1
 Application Status: Rezoning Application
 Review: First
 Architect: Yamamoto Architecture (Taizo Yamamoto)
 Owner: DVRM Investments Ltd.
 Delegation: Taizo Yamamoto, Yamamoto Architecture
 David Stoyko, Connect Landscape
 Staff: Michelle Yip & Danielle Wiley

EVALUATION: SUPPORT (3-2)

- **Introduction:** Michelle Yip, Rezoning Planner, introduced the project. The site for this rezoning application is comprised of two parcels on the northwest corner of Victoria Drive and Stainsbury Avenue, in the Kensington-Cedar Cottage local area. The developments adjacent to the site include a four-storey strata building and a five-storey rental building known as the Porter. The developments east of Victoria Drive and the SkyTrain guideway include a six-storey long-term care facility and some two to three-storey social housing developments. The areas directly to the east and south of the site are zoned RS-1 and mainly consist of single-family homes.

This site is currently zoned MC-1, which is intended to reinforce the mixed use nature of this area, permitting residential, commercial and light industrial uses. The existing MC-1 zone permits a maximum of 45 feet in height and a density of 2.5 FSR. The rezoning proposal is being considered under the *Secured Market Rental Housing Policy* (Rental 100), which allows for consideration of modest increases in height and density.

The proposal includes a consolidation of the two lots and moving the lane for a six-storey development containing 149 rental housing units with five live-work units, at a height of 60.67 feet and an FSR of 2.45.

Danielle Wiley, Development Planner, noted that the lane is proposed to be relocated to allow consolidation of two sites. The lane relocation creates some unusual conditions in terms of urban design:

- The street frontage and lane are diverging, rather than parallel;
- The triangular site with greater site depth than neighbouring development (Porter);
- The opposing development on Stainsbury will have exposed flank wall.

The proposed development itself is broken into two buildings. The East Building is a five-storey building with 0' lot line condition with adjacent existing development. Due to change in grade, its height ranges from five to four-storeys on the lane. The building steps down from four to two storeys along Stainsbury, facing one-family dwellings. The West Building is six storeys. The greatest height is at the south-east corner, at the "gap" between the two buildings. Due to the site slope, the building is five-storeys at the "flatiron" corner at Victoria/Stainsbury. It is five-storeys along Stainsbury, with setbacks for 4th and 5th storeys.

Both buildings "wrap" around the internal courtyard. Due to a one-storey drop across site depth, the courtyard is at-grade on Stainsbury, but a full storey above the street on Victoria. Parkade access and PMT (pad mounted transformer) is at the lane. There are ground-oriented "artist" studios at the Victoria side of the site. Townhouses are along Stainsbury Street and ground-oriented flat at lane, and apartments are above. There is an amenity space at-grade, facing into the courtyard.

The "Cedar Cottage MC-1 Planning Policies" contain urban design guidelines which include:

- Maintain the height and density at four-storeys and 2.5 FSR, in keeping with existing context. Express the 3rd storey cornice by setting back the 4th storey.

In response, the proposed FSR is 2.5, per the policy. The proposed heights range from five to six storeys. The 5th and 6th storeys are set back.

- No residential uses at grade (seeks commercial and light industrial job space);

In response, artist studios are at grade along the Victoria frontage. This portion of the building is concrete construction, with tall ceilings and ventilation. A small amount of retail was requested by staff, but the current proposal does not have any included.

- On long frontages, express development as series of smaller buildings;

In response, the design is expressed as two buildings.

- Improve pedestrian realm by designing at-grade building frontages with "permeability"; also planting trees of sufficient scale/size.

Staff has concerns regarding the compressed front yard setback along Victoria, with a double row of trees and sunken patios. A "gap" between buildings provides a visual break, but there is no physical connection through the site due to a one-storey retaining wall.

- Create a pedestrian-oriented "mews"/enhanced lane behind Victoria Diversion.

In response, there are ground-oriented units along the lane and a parking entry. However, a redirected lane creates challenges for an improved pedestrian realm: a blind corner and a tight "V" condition at juncture of subject property and an adjacent 'Porter' development.

- Activate the pedestrian realm by creating small open spaces in larger private developments.

In response, a setback at Victoria/Stainsbury creates a small open space. A mature tree is to be retained.

Advice from the Panel on this application is sought on the following:

1. Is the overall height and density on the site appropriate?
 2. Is the policy goal of an enhanced and “permeable” public realm achieved? (Please consider design of courtyard and open space on street frontages.)
 3. Does the reconfiguration and design of the lane succeed in creating a pedestrian-oriented “mews” and functional interface to neighbouring developments?
 4. Is the interface with the adjacent north-west development (the ‘Porter’) successful? (Consider Victoria frontage and “V” juncture at lane.)
 5. Is the “flatiron” corner of the development successful? (Victoria & Stainsbury intersection, with retained mature tree)
- **Applicant’s Introductory Comments:** The applicant introduced the project as a rental project with 149 units, with many being two-bedroom or larger. One of the first concerns was the streetwall along Victoria Drive; the height is intended to relate to the adjacent Porter building. There are over-height live-work units on Victoria. The streetwall was broken into three elements to help compensate for the façade length along Victoria Drive. On Stainsbury, the intention was to create a small-scale streetscape that relates to the townhouses to the west. The project was designed as two separate buildings with a courtyard between, with a 24-foot separation at the narrowest point. The indoor amenity is located next to the outdoor amenity for ‘spill out’ access as well as solar exposure.

The corner of the building at Victoria and Stainsbury was pushed back to retain a mature tree. At the separation between buildings, there is a forecourt, which creates an opportunity for a water feature and public art.

The materiality proposed is dark brick with simple massing and punched windows. The central portion of the east building would be cement board, whereas each corner would be brick.

Landscape on the lane is intended to be a “lush” treatment. On the street frontages, the landscape is designed as simple layered buffers, and relates to the neighbourhood character of surrounding areas. The intention was to create a buffer between patios and the sidewalk using greenery. The entry courtyard relates to the forecourt on Victoria through the use of ‘patterns’ to connect them. In the courtyard, there is ample space to create a functional urban agriculture area and amenity space as well a children’s play space.

- **Panel’s Consensus on Key Aspects Needing Improvement:**
 - The permeability of the open space needs improvement; in particular, the “forecourt” on Victoria and courtyard should be connected;
 - The “aperture” on Stainsbury should be increased (block of townhouses should be deleted);
 - There is a concern about the ‘knuckle’ between the East Building and the adjacent Porter development, including “orphaned” units beside the parking ramp;
 - The building entries should be improved, and possibly relocated to the “forecourt”.

- **Related Commentary:** The Panel generally supports the height and density of the project. However, a stronger architectural position would inform a better design of the grade change across the site, and to the entrances to the two buildings. The aperture would be an ideal place for an entry court that serves both buildings according to some of the panel.

The relationship to the neighboring developments is relatively successful. The flat iron corner of the building requires significant design development; it is good to retain the tree, but the architectural expression is too subdued. There could be more public art opportunities throughout the project. The artist studios were welcomed, as were the larger family units. The expression of a “long building” along Victoria is supported. The brick and other materials are welcomed. Panel members expressed concern about the amount of hardie panel, due to poor weathering performance over time.

- **Applicant’s Response:** The applicant appreciated the comments from the panel. The ramp location was studied and was placed there because of the grade. The approach to security in the courtyard was due to public consultation.

2. Address:	800 Robson Street
DE:	N/A
Description:	Informational session to present and receive feedback on new concept designs for Robson Square.
Zoning:	CD-1
Application Status:	Informational Session
Review:	First
Architect:	Nick Milkovitch Architects (Nick Milkovitch) Hapa Collaborative (Joe Fry)
Owner:	City of Vancouver
Delegation:	N/A
Staff:	Patrick O'Sullivan & Kate Macintosh

EVALUATION: NON-VOTING SESSION

- **Introduction:** Patrick O'Sullivan, Development Planner, along with Kate McIntyre from Engineering introduced the Robson Plaza project. Mr. O'Sullivan stated that this was a non-voting information session intended to brief the Panel about the Plaza design process to date including informing the Panel of the results of the public engagement process, describing the high level design concept for the Plaza, and welcoming Panel feedback. Mr. O'Sullivan noted that the project is an Engineering initiative. Presentation materials provided were limited to a proposed Site Plan, an existing Site Plan and two boards with diagrams and historical information. There was no model present.

The subject area of Robson Plaza is Robson Street between Howe and Hornby Streets, closed to traffic by Council as of April 20th, 2016. The context includes the Vancouver Art Gallery, the VAG Annex with steps that face onto the plaza area, the landscape mound and the Law Courts to the south; UBC and the skating rink in the lower level, and the Vancouver Art Gallery North Plaza, recently approved and currently under construction. Mr. O'Sullivan stated that the North Plaza is proposed as a large open space which includes fixed seating and landscaping, moveable chairs, a canopy area, a treed bosque, and a public bike share. Nearby is also Nordstrom and other retail uses on the 700 block of Robson; an office building at 777 Hornby and low scale retail to the east of the site on the 900 block.

Mr. O'Sullivan stated that the project's short term objective is to present the plaza proposal to Council in mid-December with a development report and an estimated budget with the aim of gaining Council support to proceed to further design development and construction in 2017. The Plaza is expected to make another appearance at the UDP in the New Year after further design development.

Nick Milkovich Architects, Hapa Collaborative and Studio Parsons have been retained by the City of Vancouver to envision a Plaza design for the 800 block of Robson Street. Kate McIntyre explained that the design team was not present at this panel appearance because the team desired to present the proposed design in a broader scope than Engineering was comfortable to reveal at this stage. Materials prepared by the design team were also not present.

Mr. O'Sullivan stated that a stakeholder and public engagement process took place in September. Stakeholders include: the Downtown and Robson Business Improvement Associations, The Province, Vancouver Public Space Network, Arthur Erickson Foundation; and tenants which include: UBC, Vancouver Art Gallery, Sheriff's Office and the Law Courts.

The City also sought public feedback through social media and open houses. The engagement process produced a set of design principles that emerged from the most frequently heard comments:

- Level the street (at the curbs) and extend the Robson Square paving treatment into the plaza area;
- Treat the ends of the block (closing the block ends) and continue the double rows of trees along Hornby St at the west end of the site; and
- Transform the lead-in blocks (700 & 900) to improve traffic, cyclist and pedestrian flows as well as unifying the Robson Street character.

Mr. O’Sullivan described the preliminary design provided on the Site Plan. The proposal indicated minimal interventions that included contiguous paving of the Robson Square paver pattern extending through the street right-of-way; bollards at the east end of the site and a double row of trees at the west end. The Site Plan also indicated possible lighting masts and a small amount of moveable furniture. The Site Plan did not indicate any locations for public toilet, bicycle racks, public bike share or any other bicycle related facilities. The Site Plan did not incorporate the UBC “pagoda” elements on Provincial land to the north and south of the subject site that intend provide covered access to UBC below street level. For background information, these proposed interventions appeared at the UDP in 2015, and were approved, but are not yet constructed.

The following additional information about the preliminary plaza design was conveyed to the panel:

- The stated goal of the Plaza design is to achieve a ‘pedestrian oasis’;
 - The space is intended to be flexible and accessible, but the stewardship of the site is still yet to be decided;
 - The intent of the design is an ‘integration’ of strategies, such as lighting, across the broader site when permission from the Provincial government is provided. This was communicated verbally but not indicated in any of the materials;
 - The trees and bollards at the site ends are proposed to signal that the site is a ‘square’ and ‘public space’;
 - The plaza is intended to accommodate a public bike share, bike racks and an automated public toilet, probably to be located at the edges. These were not depicted in the presentation material;
 - Emergency and loading vehicle access to the plaza has yet to be resolved. Access for emergency vehicles on the site from the east end could be allowed by the use of keyed, removable bollards and a rool curb.
- **Applicant’s Introductory Comments:** The design team was not in attendance to give a presentation. Kate McIntyre of Engineering provided additional details and answered questions from the panel.
 - **Panel’s Consensus on Key Aspects Needing Improvement:**
 - The design of the plaza should be shown to relate to, and be engaged with, a larger vision or masterplan for the future of the greater Robson Square as a whole. The panel felt it was unfortunate that the presentation material did not show a long term masterplan or how the plaza design is integrated with the 700 and 900 blocks of Robson Street or the broader Robson Square area;
 - The panel unanimously felt that the plaza must be a dismount only area for bicycles;
 - The plaza should remain a clutter-free open area, so that the vibrancy is provided by programming and the people;

- **Related Discussion:** The Panel outlined the following aspects in response to the drawings and presentation by city staff, summarized as follows:
 - The vibrancy of the Plaza will come from the ‘programming of the space’, and therefore the space should remain a ‘blank canvas’ that should be free of clutter, or ‘too much visual stimulation’;
 - The space should be simple and multi-functional;
 - The panel recommended that the site should be the integrating open space component of the two ends of Robson Square, the Art Gallery to the north and the Law Courts to the south; but also be considered in concert with any proposed changes to the 700 and 900 blocks of Robson St. such as a change in the number of lanes or locations of rows of trees or a change in sidewalk width;
 - The desire to accommodate food trucks or food carts would preclude the presence of permanent structures placed in the plaza space;
 - The paving is recommended to be continuous to unify the space, but there should be a simpler dropped curb along the width of Robson at the east end to slow down traffic;
 - The panel queried the plans for the previous UBC proposal to add lattice pagodas which provide access to UBC spaces below street level. Staff said that the proposal received permit approval but has not been constructed;
- **Applicant’s Response:** The design team did not attend the presentation. Engineering, representing the applicant, thanked the panel for their comments.

Adjournment

There being no further business the meeting adjourned at 6:43 p.m.