

URBAN DESIGN PANEL MINUTES

DATE: February 8, 2017

TIME: 3:00 pm

PLACE: Town Hall Meeting Room, City Hall

PRESENT: MEMBERS OF THE URBAN DESIGN PANEL:
Helen Avini Besharat
Yijin Wen
Neal LaMontagne
Kim Smith
Nell Gasiewicz
Veronica Gillies
Meredith Anderson (excused for item #1)
Renee Van Halm
Amela Brudar

REGRETS: Muneesh Sharma
James Cheng
Karen Spoelstra
David Jerke

**RECORDING
SECRETARY:** Lidia McLeod

ITEMS REVIEWED AT THIS MEETING	
1.	349 W Georgia Street (former Post Office site)
2.	95 W Hastings Street
4.	4288 Yew Street (Arbutus Centre - Block B)

BUSINESS MEETING

Chair Smith called the meeting to order at 3:00 p.m. and noted the presence of a quorum. After a brief business meeting the panel considered applications as scheduled for presentation.

1. Address: 349 W Georgia Street (former Post Office site)
 Permit No. RZ-2016-00021
 Description: The proposal is to allow the retention of the heritage building (Class A heritage, yet to be designated) and convert it into a mixed-use seven-storey podium. The proposal also adds three towers above the podium, including 17 storeys of office, and 18 and 20 storeys of residential. An overall floor space ratio of 12.9 FSR is proposed as well a total floor area of 156,021 m² (1,682,079 sq. ft.) and a height of 67.7m (222 ft.).
 Zoning: DD to CD-1
 Application Status: Rezoning Application
 Review: First
 Architect: MCM Partnership (Mark Thomson)
 Owner: John Cordonier
 Delegation: Mark Whitehead, MCM Partnership
 Mark Thomson, MCM Partnership
 Donald Luxton, Donald Luxton & Associates
 Chris Phillips, PFS Studio
 Staff: Michael Naylor & Paul Cheng

EVALUATION: NON-SUPPORT (2-5)

- **Introduction:** Michael Naylor, Rezoning Planner, introduced the project as a rezoning application concerning a prominent one-block site that contains a building listed on the post-1940 Heritage Inventory. The heritage building occupies the entire three-acre site, and the proposal is to retain the bulk of the heritage building as a podium and to add three new building elements to the top. Proposed uses include a mixture of office, retail and residential.

The site is located in Area C1 of the Downtown Official Development Plan which allows for a maximum of 7.0 FSR of non-residential uses. Residential use was removed from the Central Business District (CBD) in 2008 to restrict new development to employment-generating uses and densities were increased. Also at the time, a rezoning policy was adopted for the CBD that allows for the consideration of residential use in instances where sites which have heritage or are over 50,000 sq. ft. in area. This site has 130,000 sq. ft., which allows for it to be considered for a mixed-use development that includes residential.

The policy first requires check in with Council, which happened in May 2015. Council directed staff to consider a rezoning application for the site that retained the heritage building. Council also directed that the full 7.0 FSR of non-residential use must first be achieved before considering residential. This proposal has 7.5 FSR of retail and office, and 5.4 FSR of residential, for a total FSR of 12.9. Council also directed that the office component be located on the Georgia Street frontage, and that the application comply with the Green Buildings Policy and the Sustainable Large Developments Policy. There were also directions with regards to the form of development and the public realm along Georgia Street.

Paul Cheng, Development Planner, continued the introduction by summarizing the context of the site and noting that this is an exceptionally large heritage retention project. There is a massive floorplate which creates challenges with having uses in some of the deep dark spaces. The current adjacent sidewalk experience is also quite weak, so the project presents an opportunity to do some “urban repair”.

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

1. Current rezoning policies for large sites seek the provision of increased park space and access to nature, with the provision of large trees. In addition to the improvements with new trees to the adjacent public sidewalk on Homer, Dunsmuir and Hamilton Streets, a portion of the site is proposed to contribute as public realm along Georgia Street.
 - a. Please provide commentary on these proposed public spaces and its interface with the building, taking into consideration the challenges of topography and the existing floors of the heritage structure.
 2. Please provide commentary on the architectural strategy of the proposed addition with respect to its compatibility with the existing heritage structure. Are there any improvements that can be made to achieve a clearer contrast between the new and existing components?
 3. Is there a need to further differentiate the office and the residential components of the additions?
 4. Are the proposed changes to the heritage facades successful in retaining their original integrity while serving the programmatic requirements for adaptive re-use?
 5. Please provide commentary on the proposal's response to the Rezoning Policy for Sustainable Developments.
- **Applicant's Introductory Comments:** The applicant team started by noting that the scale of this heritage project is unique as it is quite large considering that it is a post-war era building. This post office was the largest one in Canada at the time of its construction. The scale has been broken down with an articulated grid and granite system to give the building a sense of poise. The scale of the podium is unbroken around the building with symmetrical facades and an international-style vocabulary. Some commissioned artworks are slated to be reserved.

An integrated approach to retention has been taken in order to remain sensitive to the heritage structure. A series of interventions are used to make the building more accessible and connected at the ground-plane.

This is a huge opportunity to place a large amount of density in a cross-section between Gastown, Yaletown and downtown. It is important to note that a large number of people are expected to be onsite at all times. The sidewalks are not generous, but the intent is to create as much porosity as possible and add retail at the ground-plane.

The proposed CD-1 zoning would allow an increase in density from 7.0 to 12.9 FSR with a mix of uses. There include parking, above and below grade retail, office, rental residential, and condominium residential.

The site is strategically located at what is currently a gateway location to the downtown core in the Crosstown neighbourhood. This redevelopment will provide an essential link and catalyst between the established residential neighbourhoods of Yaletown, and the transitioning Gastown and Chinatown areas.

The neighbouring context of the site is comprised of a mix of uses. Major institutional and educational buildings dominate to the south and east, the Vancouver Public Library and Queen Elizabeth Theatre among these. Immediately to the north and west are major office developments.

Linkages to transit are excellent, with close proximity to the SkyTrain via stadium station and bus transit surrounding the site. Discussion on the future of the viaduct access routes on Dunsmuir Street and Georgia Street is ongoing.

The site is approximately 130,092 sq. ft. (12,086 m²) in area, and is currently zoned C1 with a density of 7.0 FSR and a height limit of 150 ft. (45.7 m). View corridors restrict height to approximately 222 ft. (67.7 m) with exceptions at the corners.

The site is currently occupied by the former Main Post Office building, a significant landmark. Retention of almost all of the structure is proposed. Additional area and new uses are superimposed within height and view limits to create a mix of uses that contribute to and repair the neighbourhood's urban fabric in alignment with applicable policy.

The applicant team then took questions from the panel.

- **Panel's Consensus on Key Aspects Needing Improvement:**

- Consider animating the abrupt straight Georgia façade with something other than offices;
- Consider a different form on Georgia above the post office
- Provide more connectivity between Homer Street and Hamilton Street;
- The terraced walls on Hamilton Street are too high;
- Consider how the office entrance takes up street space and how this will affect after-hour use;
- More animation is needed on the Georgia Street side;
- Add more public space to this terrace area rather than private outdoor café space
- Design development to reduce the building mass;
- Design development to better daylight the building spaces;
- Design development to better relate the rhythm of the top additions to the post-office;
- Mitigate after-hour office light pollution in consideration of the building residents;
- Design development to better animate Homer Street;
- Consider Hamilton Street and location of car and loading access in relation to Queen Elizabeth Plaza.

- **Related Commentary:** The panel noted that this project has a lot of well-handled complexities, and that this was a very comprehensive presentation. However, the units are not wide enough to contain the proposed bedroom layouts. Design development is needed to fix this.

Consider how this building will make a difference in the public realm to create special spaces. Really think about how the public will be able to use this space rather than just thinking about the site as an opportunity for luxury retail. Retail is good, but there needs to be less privatized space and more given over to true use by the public.

Consideration should be given to connecting Homer Street and Hamilton Street somehow to allow pedestrian traffic flow between them.

Consider bringing retail to the building edge on Homer, rather than a private and enclosed hall buffer between the retail and the sidewalk.

Attention needs to be paid to improving accessibility throughout the site. Consider after-hours uses in the building and how the spaces in and around the building will be used during those times. Something needs to be done to better activate the street all around the block. There needs to be something which draws people in. More shortcuts are needed throughout the site to provide more porosity and connection between the blocks. Provide a much more thought-out plan for public art.

The project is lacking an element of excitement. It is understandable that the upper floors are subordinate to the lower heritage portion, but they do not need to be monotonous. There is room for more diversity within the architecture and more relationship to the architectural language of the post office.

Pay attention to resolving the parking better. Follow the rules, but if the parking can be reduced then the bulk will be reduced as well. The trend of Vancouver is one of becoming increasingly less dependent on vehicles. Relaxing the amount of parking required will prevent the building from being too bulky and allow the building to better express itself through shape.

The panel was split on whether there needs to be more differentiation between the office and residential components. Some members did not think that differentiation between offices and residential is needed. Others members thought that differentiation between offices and residential are not needed aesthetically, but consideration should be given to how these spaces are going to be used and whether or not different components are needed to encourage these uses.

The proposed changes to the heritage facades are successful. However, this feels like three buildings stuck on top of a podium and lacks connection to the site typology. One panel member thought that the podium should not contain any residential components and be converted to 100% office use instead. Overall the entire structure feels too monolithic, so consider ways to break it up.

The current sunlight levels on the site are not ideal for a daycare, so consider ways to increase sun exposure. The garden is currently too shady and will not function as an adequate outdoor amenity for those who reside in the building. The public space seems to be too nondescript overall and needs further design development in order to resolve this.

More passive acknowledgment could be given by the facades with regards to orientation.

Something should be done with regards to social sustainability. There needs to be something to draw young Vancouverites into this building to live as they are the best way to add animation to the downtown in the long-term. Creation of more affordable suites (with adequate space) for young people to inhabit would be an ideal way to accomplish this. Market suites towards a younger demographic in order to ensure continued thriving in the long run.

- **Applicant's Response:** The applicant team thanked the panel and mentioned that the comments were good, and that they appreciated the opportunity to present. Office light-pollution should not be a problem considering the depth of the space, and more connectivity will certainly be considered between the streets across the site. All of the comments will be taken to heart.

2. Address:	95 W Hastings Street
Permit No.	RZ-2016-00034
Description:	The proposal is for a 10-storey mixed-use building with commercial use at grade and residential above (132 secured market rental units, with 35% two-bedroom family units), over two levels of underground parking (two Class B loading spaces, 84 vehicle spaces, 167 Class A bicycle spaces and eight Class B bicycle spaces), with a height of 105 ft., a total floor area above grade of 9,195.4 sq. m. (98,978 sq. ft.), and a floor space ratio (FSR) of 7.62 (0.53 commercial and 7.09 residential).
Zoning:	DD to CD-1
Application Status:	Rezoning Application
Review:	First
Architect:	Gair Williamson Architects (Gair Williamson)
Owner:	Holborn
Delegation:	Gair Williamson, Gair Williamson Architects Phil Scott, Holborn
Staff:	Linda Gillan & Jason Olinek

EVALUATION: SUPPORT (7-1)

- **Introduction:** Linda Gillan, Rezoning Planner, introduced the project as a rezoning application for 95 W Hastings Street. The site for this rezoning application is comprised of two parcels on the northeast corner of Hastings Street and Abbott Street. It has a frontage of 98.5 ft. on Hastings Street and is 132 ft. deep, with a site area of 12,984.5 sq. ft. currently used as a surface parking lot. Site is currently zoned Downtown District (DD). Across the lane to the north is the Gastown Historic Area (HA-2) and across Abbott Street to the west is the Woodwards site (CD-1).

This application is being considered under the Downtown Eastside Plan and Victory Square Policy Plan. Under the policy rezoning applications may be considered for market projects where there is a public benefit. This includes social housing, secured market rental housing, and heritage building rehabilitation. The maximum allowable height for a rezoning is 105 ft., and allowable density is based on urban design performance.

The Green Buildings Policy for Rezonings also applies for this site, requiring a minimum of LEED Gold or equivalent. The application is to rezone from DD to CD-1 to allow for a 10-storey mixed-use building with commercial use at grade. Proposed are 132 secured market rental units, including 83 studio units, three one-bedroom units and 46 two-bedroom units. The proposed density is 7.62 FSR.

Jason Olinek, Development Planner, continued the introduction by noting that Victory Square is part of the historic core of downtown Vancouver. Its distinct urban form influenced and shaped the city's early development. In the 1920's, Hastings Street overtook Cordova Street to become the city's dominant commercial corridor. This lasted through the 1950's.

The main characteristics of the historic urban form found in Victory Square include:

- Dense urban commercial pedestrian realm;
- Narrow building frontages reflecting a subdivision pattern;
- Characteristic "saw tooth" street wall profile created by varying building heights;
- Late Victorian or Edwardian era architecture;
- Cubic massing, dense site coverage, internal setbacks for light wells and courtyards;
- Masonry as the predominant building material; and
- Features such as punched window openings and projecting cornices.

City Engineering requested a 1.2m SRW along Abbott St. Given the existing heritage building setbacks, it was agreed a 3.7m x 3.7m chamfer serving as 'crush space' at the corner would instead be requested.

The Gastown Heritage neighbourhood starts immediately to the north of the 20 ft. commercial lane. Adjacent developments also include the Woodwards development and Heritage Buildings to North and east. Consideration should be given to the mature Street trees around the site, and the potential redevelopment of the adjacent vacant lot using similar design guidelines and principles as the current application. A residential lobby will be located on mid-block of Abbott Street, and continuous ground floor retail is required along W Hastings Street. Loading, garbage and parking access are to be located off lane. Provided amenities include bulk storage, bike storage and a three-storey gymnasium all located above grade.

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

1. The intent for new development in Victory Square is to retain or enhance the existing historic context but with contemporary architectural expression. Please provide commentary on the proposed response to this prevailing historic context.
 2. The goal for development in Victory Square is to support vibrant street activity. Please provide commentary on relationship and response to enhancing the public realm.
 3. Increased height and increased density is permitted through rezoning for developments that meet urban design objectives including bulk, massing, setbacks, street wall and other form generators evident in the immediate context. Please provide commentary on the response to these urban design performance objectives and in general.
- **Applicant's Introductory Comments:** The applicant team started by noting that the fenestrations are standardized and the window sizes hold the building together. The windows are punched openings which, in part, contribute to the LEED targets. Patios and public art are planned for the street. The ground level storefronts will open up onto the sidewalk, permitting more active uses. The goal of the project is to be a background building, serving as a transition from the Victory square to the higher density Woodwards development.

In order to maximize amenities bike parking was elevated, and above that there is bulk storage. Above the bulk storage there is a porch, an exercise room and an amenity room. The FSR seems a bit high because bike parking and the storage space are both included in it. Consideration is given to having bike-share bicycles on site.

Glass canopies at the ground plane turn the corner towards the residential entry on Abbott Street, and there is a clear canopy to protect from rain over the stair going down from the upper levels to the shared amenity. The only change at the lane is that the exterior cladding will be treated in composite stone rather than a subordinate material. The ground floor is done in composite stone, and there are some very nice exposed concrete walls adjacent to the site. Colours include silver, zinc and grey.

The piers and fenestration are drilled upwards and over the roof to create a series of multi-functional rooms which can be used in a variety of ways. There is an intensive green-roof system with a large amount of water-retention and permeable paving weaving around in a grid pattern. Juliet balconies were not used; instead there are two hopper windows to allow air to move through the spaces while still providing a sense of ownership.

On the edge of the building there is proposed signage which suggests a sense of interplay between the darker and lighter elements. Lighting on the mural on the Paris Block Building is proposed until the adjacent lot is redeveloped.

The applicant team then took questions from the panel.

- **Panel's Consensus on Key Aspects Needing Improvement:**

- High-quality durable materials such as stone should be used at and near grade;
- Design development to the saw-tooth expression and character;
- Consider use of metal panels maybe being too modern set in the heritage context;
- Consider variation in colours other than just shades of grey;
- Family units should be considered in terms of liveability, size and window placement;
- Consideration to add more definition of the play space at the roof;
- The roof is currently too busy and could be more ordered;
- Consideration should be given to impacts and development potential on the adjacent orphaned site including parking access.

- **Related Commentary:** The panel noted that this is subtle and has a classical sensibility to it. However, metal panels may not be the right move so at least consider other options. Studios and one-bedrooms are definitely a better fit than family housing for this location.

The project has good articulation and will fit in well. However, the front façade needs a bit more differentiation to capture the saw-tooth pattern. The building is a bit too contemporary and could do more to connect it with the historical context of Victory Square. It is great that the building is restrained and disciplined, and there is a good old/new balance struck with materials. It would be nice if the building was more open and inviting. A little bit of 'something' could also be added.

The landscape is bold and has a good range of materials. However, there is more urban agriculture than is actually needed.

There was full support for the height and density, but there are some minor concerns about the lack of an upper-storey setback. In general the massing is appropriate, though.

- **Applicant's Response:** The applicant team noted that the orphaned site will probably be done by them if the current owners ever sell. Regardless, it is unlikely that the site will be rezoned to anything larger than was considered.

3. Address:	4288 Yew Street (Arbutus Centre - Block B)
Permit No.	DP-2016-00333
Description:	To develop this site with a seven-storey, mixed-use building, with commercial at grade and residential above (170 dwelling units) with a total floor area of approximately 19,628 m ² and two levels of underground parking accessed off of Yew Street.
Zoning:	CD-1
Application Status:	Complete Development Application
Review:	Second (First at DP)
Architect:	Dialog Architecture (Robin Hall)
Owner:	Larco Investments
Delegation:	Norm Hotson, Dialog Architecture Margot Long, PWL Partnership Art Phillips, Larco Investments
Staff:	Tim Potter

EVALUATION: SUPPORT (6-2)

- **Introduction:** Tim Potter, Development Planner, introduced the application as a 28,000 m² site across the street from the Arbutus Club, in the vicinity of Prince of Wales Secondary School. The site currently holds a shopping mall, Safeway, and surface parking.

This is the second phase of a development application. The proposal is for a mixed-use seven-storey building. Height and density are within the terms of the approved Policy Statement for this site.

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

1. Please comment on the success of the north elevation along the mews in terms of articulation and pedestrian interest.
 2. Please comment on the overall expression and cohesiveness of design of the building elevations.
 3. Please comment on the uses, CRU and pedestrian activation along Arbutus Street.
 4. Please comment on the landscape relative to the following aspects:
 - a. Design of the courtyard;
 - b. Overall quality of public realm design and treatments;
 - c. Success of the selection of Trees to provide visual interest, pedestrian scale, and successful outside space.
- **Applicant's Introductory Comments:** The applicant team noted that the retail frontage on Arbutus Street is somewhat limited. A residential access is used to make a logical break in the land use, and there are spaces for potential restaurants and some corner retail for community use. There are also a financial institutional and a currently existing liquor store.

The heights are proscribed by policy statements and the rezoning. This development was made to communicate and respond to the sister development at Block A.

There are bike storage rooms off an interior courtyard where glazing is being used to allow people to see others coming and going with bikes. Existing oak trees are to be retained, and the parking structure is pulled back to allow this. Amenity rooms and generous roof decks are being provided, which include urban agriculture and a BBQ space along with some intensive green roofs. On Arbutus Street the median is staying but the road is expanding, so there will be roadside parking. An agreement with the City has been made to ensure that the boulevard has planting along both sides.

The applicant team then took questions from the panel.

- **Panel's Consensus on Key Aspects Needing Improvement:**
 - Design development to make the retail and street less monotonous;
 - There are concerns about the long balconies on the north side becoming messy storage spaces;
 - The Arbutus Street expanse could have more robust retail;
 - Reduce the size of the pedestrian entrance on the north side;
 - Design development to better define all the entrances;
 - More outdoor space is needed for the development;
 - Expand accessibility and better program the green roof spaces;
 - Reduce the amount of private roof space to open it up more to the public;
 - More cohesiveness is needed with regards to the landscape design;
 - More play elements are needed onsite;
 - The park 'corridors' are too dark and require more light;
 - Design development is needed on the urban agriculture;
 - More 'fun' is needed in the mews on the north elevation.
- **Related Commentary:** The panel thought that the elevations present as logical, clean and clear. The brick and canopies are good, but there could be a bit more variety to the northern elevation than just colourful canopies. More needs to be done to elevate the streetscape, perhaps by allowing the commercial spaces to spill out onto the street (restaurants, craft breweries, etc.), and consider cutting the commercial frame short to provide some relief. The applicant should also consider whether the patios should really overlook the mews, and if more greenery should be provided to add screening.

Some editing is needed to make the project stronger as there are a lot of languages and vocabularies which need to be better resolved. This project would also be stronger if it was plainer and if access was provided to the play area from the mews. Really take a look at the ground plane on all elevations as they need major improvements to the expression, materiality, scale and canopy. Consider that the building is too symmetrical, and that this imposes a formal language on everything.

Some Commercial Retail Units (CRUs) are more developed than others, so think about resolving them better. It would have been more logical if the smaller and more intimate CRUs were off the mews, rather than the major retailer. There is a need for CRU hierarchy, especially along Arbutus Street. As well, the streetscape seems a bit dry and something should be done to stop the relentless expression of 'sameness' all over the retail elevation. More consideration is also needed with regards to lighting and signage and how they will integrate with the streetscape.

More outside amenity opportunities are required; especially considering children and regardless of the close-by park. The courtyard and rooftop need more programming and also need to be much more generous. The east wing green roof should be accessible as well as the west wing roof. It is a wasted opportunity to have the second level deck overlook the courtyard without having any programming in this space. More thought should also be given to the provision of urban agriculture; who is it for and how will it be used? Design development is also needed to reduce the long relentlessness of the corridors by breaking them up and bringing in more natural light. Finally, reconsider the orientation of the green roofs as they do not appear to work well currently.

- **Applicant's Response:** The applicant team appreciated all the comments and thought that they were excellent. They then thanked the panel.

Adjournment

There being no further business the meeting adjourned at 8:15 p.m.