

YAMAMOTO ARCHITECTURE

May 10, 2016

City of Vancouver
Development Services Department
453 West 12th Avenue
Vancouver, BC V5Y 1V4
Attn: Allan Moorey

Dear Allan,

Re: River District – Parcels 20 & 21: Design Rationale

CONTEXT

Parcels 20 & 21 are located on the eastern edge of the River District. The site is bound by Marine Way to the north, the future Avalon Park to the east, Sawmill Crescent and Road “D” to the west, and Kent Avenue North to the south. The Design Guidelines outlines the Urban Design Role of this parcel as follows:

“High exposure of all frontages – Crescent, park, Kent and Road “D” – calls for a dignified residential character appropriate to this very public position at east entry to the Town Square precinct.”

The site acts as a gateway for entries to the River District off of Marine Way along Sawmill Crescent to the north, and from the eastern approach to the site from Kent Avenue North.

SITE PLANNING

With the development of the Town Square, the alignment of Sawmill Crescent has changed to provide better geometry with the intersection of Sawmill Crescent with Marine Way. As a result, the site has been considerably reduced in size. The resulting site is 8% smaller than what shown in guidelines (over 8000SF). In addition, the re-aligned Sawmill Crescent now swings further into the site, reducing the site depth on the northern portion of Parcel 21.

In addition to the reduced site area, we are locating 15,237 SF of floor area which has been transferred to this parcel from Parcel 43.

The change in site geometry and size combined with the increased density have all informed our site planning approach, and the proposed minor deviations from the Design Guidelines.

PLANNING STRATEGIES

The guidelines suggest a 16 storey tower located on the southwestern corner of the block, with another 10 storey tower located mid-block facing the park. With the “pinched” site, the location of the tower proposed by the guidelines is challenging. In the Guideline location, the tower would further reduce the already narrowed courtyard.

Our proposal is to shift the eastern tower further south, and pair it with the southwest tower. This achieves the following:

- Alleviates the pinch-point and opens up the courtyard
- Improves livability of the second tower by locating it further away from the traffic and noise of Marine Way
- Improves the gateway character of the south-eastern corner of site and approach to River District from Kent Ave North
- Provides a more balanced massing facing Avalon Park, with the eastern Parcel 20 tower balanced by a longer, more horizontal building on the eastern edge of Parcel 21

The additional transferred density, and the increased density resulting from the reduced site area is distributed in the following way:

- increased height on the Parcel 21 mid-rises; the west building to 5 storeys, and east building to 6 storeys. Note that for the quality of space within the courtyard, the increased height is offset by the raised courtyard level.
- increased height of eastern tower on Parcel 21 to 16 / 14 storeys
- increased building height for mid-rise between the towers to 5 storeys

GUIDELINE ANALYSES

Garden Court

The Guidelines suggest a predominantly hard-scaped court with circulation for cars, firefighter access, parkade entry ramps, and loading bays. The resulting space minimizes the potential for landscaping and creates ground level patios the front onto a vehicular court. Our approach is to elevate the courtyard above the ground level, creating a more usable outdoor space above the service-oriented ground level. With this approach, vehicular parking and access is covered and separated from the large, usable outdoor space. To unify the entire parcel, the elevated courtyard spans over the pedestrian Mews with two bridges to create a continuous outdoor space at the 2nd floor level. In addition to the horizontal courtyard created at the second level, the courtyard also includes the vertical space between the towers. Trees are located on the roof of the mid-rise between the towers, and in feature open-space voids within the towers themselves.

In this way, the park is brought into the site and onto the buildings, creating a transition between the more urban Town Center to the west, and the Avalon Park to the east.

Crescent Street Frontage

The Guidelines designate Sawmill Crescent as a more “urban” character street with modest setbacks. With the new Sawmill Crescent alignment, the site is more compressed, resulting in setbacks that are slightly less than the Guideline recommendations. At the narrowest point, the setback to the upper stories is 1M, however the ground floor setback is 1.7M to the narrowest point. The urban character is emphasized with a strong street-wall that is bent to reinforce the curve of Sawmill Crescent. At the ground floor a row of townhouses creates an active streetscape and strong rhythm that relates to the pedestrian scale.

The concept for the western Parcel 21 building is to establish a strong street-wall of simple brick planes with punched windows and balconies. A metal surround around the windows and at the perimeter frame of the brick emphasizes the thin plane of the brick wall. The dark metal brick surrounds relates to the darker metal cladding of the northeast building and canopy frame steel. Between the western building and the western “end” of the east building, a cascading water feature provides pedestrian interest and a visual connection to the raised courtyard.

Kent Avenue North Frontage

The Guidelines call for larger setbacks and a more relaxed, residential character along Kent Avenue. The Guidelines also suggest a ramp to the parkade accessed from the Kent Avenue frontage. Our approach is to maintain the larger setbacks and create a row of townhouses the front Kent Avenue between the two towers. The lobby for the eastern tower is located along this frontage, and provides a south-facing plaza that opens up views from the Kent Avenue Greenway to Avalon Park. We have also eliminated the parkade entry ramp which improves the streetscape and minimizes potential conflict between pedestrians and vehicles. The visual connection between Kent Avenue and the courtyard is preserved in the form of a gap between the western tower and the mid-rise between the towers. Within this space, a lookout cantilevers towards the south and providing a focal point and visual connection between Kent Avenue North and the second level courtyard.

The slender sides of both towers are oriented to this streetscape, creating a small, varied "skyline" along the northern edge of the open space created by Kent Avenue North and the CPR SRW.

Avalon Park Frontage

As suggested by the Guidelines, additional height is proposed against the Avalon Park frontage. The tower is relocated to northern edge of Parcel 20, and creates a vertical visual anchor that offsets the horizontality of the Parcel 21 building. We feel that the 14 storey tower and 6 storey building creates an appropriate backdrop to address the scale of the open space of the park.

The Parcel 21 building responds to the scale of the Marine Way and the Park. We have a rare opportunity to do a building with a long frontage and visibility from far away. The building volume is very simple, with the timber or glulam posts spanning between the 2nd level to 5th level slabs, and supported by concrete columns below. The posts establish a grid that organizes random balconies with varying treatment of clear and fritted glass. The posts and framework approach also have a dialogue with the tower on Parcel 20, and reference the industrial mill heritage of the site.

On the courtyard, the building is a simple volume with punched windows. Interest and animation are provided by the standing seam metal cladding and cantilevered balconies that become more random towards the southern edge of the building.

Tower Design

The Parcel 20 tower forms remain very simple to play off the scale of the open space of the foreground park. Each tower is split into two volumes to emphasize verticality and more slender proportions. In addition, each half of the tower is "sheared" and offset to reduce shadowing into the courtyard.

The concept for the towers is to introduce a frame-work of balconies and planters facing the west and east (park) elevations. This frame-work operates at the overall scale of the building, by creating a large grid-like element that helps to reinforce the simple building volume. At the same time, the frame creates an armature that gathers balconies, double-height balconies, and planters that will provide greenery on upper levels of the tower.

The inside faces of the towers are much quieter, with large-scale voids and planters mid-way up the building on either side of the "vertical courtyard." The Colour palette is more neutral with elements of colour or more warmth at building entries, and at the recessed voids on upper floors. The lobbies for each building extend onto outdoor rooms or mini-plazas, facing the mews and road to the west and facing the park on the southeast. In plaza facing the park we are showing a large wall that would be a great opportunity for public art. This would also help define the entry lobby and the mural could continue inside the building.

Courtyard Design and Program

The elevated courtyard provides an oasis above the ground floor parking and vehicle access. In the courtyard the form of the mid-rise buildings is kept very clean so that the space of the courtyard is as uncluttered as possible. Both buildings flanking it are simple volumes; with the northeast building having longer balconies to respond to the afternoon sun. The courtyard offers multiple functions for the residents, including play areas for children, garden plots, informal lawn areas, water features, and spill-out patios in front of the amenity area.

Mews

The objective for the mews is to create a unique space with a welcoming character, and to minimize conflict between cars, trucks, and pedestrians. The mews is a shared space for residents and the public, and provides vehicle and loading access as well as pedestrian access through the site. As such, it has been designed as a multi-purpose plaza. We have proposed that separation between cars, trucks, and pedestrians be provided by bollards over a continuous paved surface, rather than breaking up the space into a series of smaller, single-use paved areas.

In the middle of the block, the mews gently slopes up to the raised courtyard with large planted "hills" that contain a series of board-formed planters for trees. In this way, the upper courtyard and planting "folds" down into the mews area. The planter materiality is proposed to be integrated with the paving of the mews floor. The undersides of the courtyard bridges could have integrated linear lighting, and we are considering some in-paving lighting to create an interesting space at night.

The mews is activated by building lobbies and amenity rooms along its length. This ensures that the mews will be a vibrant space. The amenity areas and entry lobby plazas are designed so that they can spill out into the mews during special events to add further activity.

RELAXATIONS REQUESTED

We are requesting the following relaxations from the CD Zoning Guidelines:

West Setback along Sawmill Crescent:

Reduced from 2M to 1M due to the encroachment onto the site from the realigned Sawmill Crescent.

Note that the ground floor has been setback approximately 1.7M at the tightest location to ensure that there is a buffer between ground level townhouses and the sidewalk.

10.11.2 Relaxation for Decorative Roof:

Building height exceeded for mechanical appurtenances:

- a) In order to screen mechanical equipment and simplify volume of tower elevator / mechanical penthouse**
- b) No additional floor area proposed within the additional height**