

**Date:** MAY 11, 2026

**Time:** 3:00 p.m.

**Place:** City Hall Joe Wai Room/ Council Chambers

**PRESENT:**

**Board Members:**

Michelle Au, Director, Permitting Services, Development, Building and Licensing (Chair)  
Corrie Okell, General Manager, Development, Buildings, and Licensing  
Lon LaClaire, General Manager, Engineering Services  
Matt Shillito, Director of Special Projects Planning, Urban Design, and Sustainability

**Advisory Panel:**

Tony Osborn, Representative of Urban Design Panel  
Alex Putrenko, Representative of Development Industry  
Arno Matis, Representative of Design Professions  
Joe Carreria, Representative of Development Industry  
Lily Chan, Representative of General Public

**601 W Cordova St (PRELIMINARY APPLICATION) DP-2025-00916 – DD (Area B)**

**Delegation:**

James K.M. Cheng Architects

**City Staff:**

M. So, Development Review Branch, Permitting Services  
S. Black, PDS Strategic Programs  
J. Smallwood, Permitting Services, Development, Building and Licensing  
K. Hsieh, Development Services  
E. Sabadlan, PDS Urban Design & Development Planning – Heritage  
R. Moss, PDS Urban Design & Development planning - Landscape  
D. Lee, Engineering Services

**Recording Analyst:**

E. Garrido

**1. MINUTES APPROVED**

Approval of Minutes of Feb 23, 2025, for 1395 Rolston St

**2. BUSINESS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES**

None

**3. 601 W Cordova St (PRELIMINARY APPLICATION) DP-2025-00916 – DD (Area B)**

Applicant: James K.M. Cheng Architects

Request: To alter the below grade staging and storage area of the existing municipally designated heritage railway station (CPR Station), and to add a new 22 storey tower on the site consisting of retail use at grade and general office uses from levels 2 to 22, with an outdoor plaza

**Planner's Comments**

Sailen Black, Development Planner, presented the proposal and summarized the recommendations contained in the Staff Committee Report.

**1.0 Prior to the consideration by the Development Permit Board, a complete development application and a decision regarding that application, the applicant is to satisfactorily address the following:**

- 1.1 Reduction of the extent of the tower massing to approximately 40 m (131 ft.) from the north property line and approximately 36 m (118 ft.) from the future Statutory Right of Way, and to increase the vertical separation between the top of the CPR Station and the proposed office levels as seen from Cordova Street.

**Note to Applicant:** Intent is to reduce the width of the tower, especially the wider levels located above the basic height limit and the portions overhanging the CPR Station, to create a tall, slender form that mitigates impacts to the site, existing views, the CPR Station, other heritage buildings, and the character and amenity of the area in general. Refer to the criteria for additional height in the *Downtown ODP* and the goals of the *Downtown (Except Downtown South) Design Guidelines* for views and physical design.

Consideration will be given to additional tower massing below the basic maximum height if located within approximately a 40 m by 36 m area starting at the north property line and aligned with the street grid, provided the other conditions and policy in this report are met. Further the applicant is instructed to work with staff to develop a more compatible building form that is more subordinate to the heritage context and responds strongly to the public realm and road network.

- 1.2 Revision of the design:

- i. to remove any structures and/or encumbrances above the Option to Purchase area and/or future Statutory Right of Way connecting W Cordova Street to the north property line, and
- ii. to remove any structures extending into the Seymour Street view as shown in the *Central Waterfront Hub Framework*;

**Note to Applicant:** Intent of item (i) is to enable a complete range of design options for the future Cordova Connector as envisioned in the *Central Waterfront Hub Framework* and allow for the full range of transportation modes; and to ensure the amenity and attractiveness of this space for future pedestrian and active transportation users. Intent of both (i) and (ii) is to preserve existing views north through the site along these axes. This condition also supports the intents of condition 1.1. See also, Standard Engineering conditions **Error! Reference source not found.** and **Error! Reference source not found.**

**2.0 That the conditions set out in Appendix A be met prior to the submission of a complete Development Permit Application. of the Development Permit.**

**3.0 That the Notes to Applicant and Conditions set out in Appendix B be approved by the Board.**

**4.0 That the complete application be dealt with by the Development Permit Board.**

### Applicants' Comments

The applicant will work with staff to meet the conditions for approval.

The applicant and staff took questions from the Board and Panel members.

### Speakers' Comments

Speaker #1, Mary H Pynenburg opposed the project, her experience as a Vancouver architect/planner argues the proposal fails all three key tests: the additional height is unjustified (poor fit, impacts, limited public benefit), it conflicts with the adopted waterfront hub framework (far exceeding intended scale and timing), and it is incompatible with the historic context (overwhelming Waterfront Station and nearby heritage assets). The project is inconsistent with policy, does not earn its height, and approval would set a damaging precedent at a critical gateway site.

Speaker #2, Charles Dobson, opposed the project, and mentioned that the current proposal contains all the problems of previously rejected proposals. The site is too small, the building is too large, it doesn't fit the context of Waterfront Station or Gas Town, and it ignores the guidelines for the central waterfront hub framework. Jamming a giant office tower into this location before anything else will be confound the design of the transportation hub. This is a tiny site wedged between Granville Square and Gas Town. Little room for the future needs of the largest multimodal transportation hub in the entire region.

It would be unwise to add major development before resolving core transit issues. Public and private development should be planned together under a unified hub framework.

From reviewing other cities, progress often stalls due to fragmented property ownership, so coordinating landowners is critical. Land swaps—possibly including non-local ones—are key to making projects

work. Given federal ownership of the station, a logical approach would involve partnerships and land exchanges with major stakeholders like Cadillac Fairview.

Speaker #3, Peter Kreuk, opposed the project, and commented that the planning process has not been moving and evolving quickly enough to deal with this site. Commented to do the planning first and then the design of the building later.

The speaker participated in the development of the Olympic Village in Vancouver and the shipyards in North Vancouver and noted that these projects celebrate their waterfront locations. They create a strong sense of community and place. Both these successful projects evolve from an overall design master plan to the individual buildings and the coordinated public realm.

He has worked with the developer, Cadillac Fairview, and the architect Jim Cheng, and Chris Phillips, the landscape architect, and Hiroko way back. And they've contributed greatly to the City of Vancouver. With a master plan, they can contribute greatly to this site as well.

So the important thing here is the proposed enhancement to this unique location should contribute to the heritage of the area and create a public open space which is desirable for people to come and not be a road right of way Downtown master plan first, then the design for the individual sites second.

Speaker #4, Anthony Norfolk, opposed the project and expressed concerns regarding the planning process and the treatment of heritage buildings. He noted that the proposal does not align with key heritage principles of being subordinate, compatible, and distinguishable within the historic context of Gastown. He stated that the building is not compatible or subordinate but instead dominates the area. He urged Council to consider the Heritage Commission's resolution and emphasized that comprehensive planning, including consideration of the reopening of Granville Street, should occur before proceeding with the development.

Speaker #5, Michael Alexander, opposed the project and noted that being a member of the Downtown Waterfront Working Group and founder of SFU's City Conversations Program, is advocating for a comprehensive waterfront plan before any site-specific decisions.

With experience in San Francisco planning—including work on the Presidio and major infrastructure—I question Cadillac Fairview's proposal to add dense development at Waterfront Station, a highly constrained, heritage-rich, and symbolically important transit hub.

While Cadillac Fairview owns multiple downtown sites better suited for growth, this proposal concentrates density where it has the greatest public impact and bypasses long-delayed area-wide planning. A better approach is to shift development to appropriate sites within its portfolio, preserving the waterfront's integrity. Approving the proposal risks setting a precedent for piecemeal intensification that undermines both heritage conservation and coherent long-term planning.

Speaker # 6, Thomas William Phipps, commented that this site is pivotal, linking Granville Street, the historic CPR station, and the port, and council has already adopted a hub framework calling for a complete waterfront plan before approving individual projects. Great public places require patience—they evolve over decades, as seen with the seawall, Granville Island, North Vancouver Shipyards, and the convention center itself. Progress is being made, and complex transit phasing and servicing issues justify deferring development. Council should uphold its policies, allow planning efforts to mature, and avoid premature decisions that could lead to long-term mistakes.

### **Panel Comments**

Tony Osbourne, as part of the advisory panel and the Chair of the Urban Design Panel when this

application was considered, summarized the recommendations made at that meeting as follows:

The first was to study raising the first occupied floors of the building. The application materials weren't modified specifically, but it seems like the applicant team is still considering that further consideration should be given to increasing the separation between the first occupied floors and the station to meet that request.

The second was to study making the form feel less bulky and better integration of the tree metaphor. Progress could be made with the design of the applicant team's revised proposal.

The third recommendation was to study programming the ground plane to ensure the interim plaza functions well, the lobby space is activated and the connection to the station building is strong. The revised design should proceed in that direction.

There's potential for it to be developed in a way that could respond more to these comments and be more suitable to the context for this project.

Joe Carreira commends the applicant for delivering a thoughtful, high-quality design that responds to current demand for office space, especially as workers return downtown. The proposed additional height is considered justified by the building's strong architecture, outdoor spaces, and varied floor plates, which enhance usability, tenant appeal, and market flexibility despite added cost.

Highlighted the benefits to the skyline, views, and public realm, and believe the design appropriately respects and complements nearby heritage buildings while helping activate those areas. Overall, they support staff's recommendation for approval in principle.

Also suggested some flexibility on Condition 1, noting the innovative tower design and value of varied plate sizes. While the applicant has addressed statutory rights-of-way, they feel there may be room for minor design features like selective overhangs, to be refined with staff.

Lily Chan commented that the area contains layered histories and complexity, making a mix of building styles appropriate and enriching. Views down Seymour Street provide a glimpse of the building, adding visual interest and drawing people toward the waterfront. Such complexity contributes positively to the city and supports revitalization of a struggling area through increased activity and investment.

Concerns about overhangs affecting the pedestrian experience are minimal, as the overhangs are high and the south-facing public realm is generous. With further design development, a pedestrian-friendly plaza could enhance the street-level experience. Overhangs add architectural interest and complexity to the building's form and massing while responding well to site constraints. Encouraged additional attention to public space during design development to further enhance the area.

Hilary Macdonald, representing the Heritage Commission, commented that they didn't find it to be compatible, nor did we find it to be subordinate for the area that it sits in and as an example of the entrance into Gastown itself. And although many of them really enjoyed the structure and appreciated the way it looked, but felt it was in the wrong place. Reinstating that as the Heritage Commission, they did not approve of the structure to be placed right next to the station.

Alex Putrenko commented that it is important to consider many perspectives for a landmark site that often forms visitors' first impression of Vancouver, as an arrival point by SkyTrain, seaplane, ferry, or cruise ship. This prominent location warrants a dynamic architectural form rather than a typical tower to support the city's image and economic development.

Premium office space is key to attracting high-quality tenants and companies from outside the region, and the proposal responds to this need. The design is efficient, retaining the plaza and minimizing impact on the existing parking lot.

Overall, the project is strong and should proceed with further collaboration with staff to refine the form and consider requested relaxations. Improved connectivity to surrounding sites would also be beneficial.

Arno Matis commented that the project has been thoroughly reviewed by UDP, Heritage, and through extensive public input. Given the applicant team's additional information, there is confidence they can work collaboratively with staff to find a good solution. The PDP conditions set by staff are appropriate, with some flexibility recommended to allow an 18,000 sq ft floor plate and limited SRW encroachment. Overall, the project should move forward with this flexibility.

### **Board Discussion**

Matt Shillito commented on how two key tests apply: the project must not limit future transit integration and central waterfront planning, and it must deliver an outstanding design for this prominent, heritage-sensitive site.

The proposal supports transit-oriented office use and its siting—tucked behind the station with a smaller footprint and “tree” concept—is strong, preserving views and space for future connections. The height is acceptable, but anything above zoning must be clearly justified.

However, the current massing is too bulky and top-heavy, diminishing the design concept and conflicting with the heritage context. Significant redesign is needed to create a slimmer, more elegant form that better reflects the tree inspiration and reduces impacts.

With key conditions (including protecting rights-of-way, views, and transit functionality) and further design development, the project could evolve into a successful fit for the site.

Lon LaClaire addressed this as a unique and highly valued site, with strong public attachment. Key priorities are protecting the precious Seymour Street view to the mountains and preserving a clear, open right-of-way that will function as a future street. Overbuilding or overhangs would compromise light, openness, and urban quality.

At the same time, the site is well-suited for significant job space, and there is support for maximizing development within firm limits on the view cone and right-of-way. The southern plaza has strong potential as an activated public space.

Overall, the current proposal does not yet fit, but as a preliminary submission it provides a basis for refinement. With clearer guidance and design development, there is confidence that a strong, well-resolved project can emerge.

Corrie Okell commented that the proposal is for a highly prominent, historically significant waterfront site. While the ambition and design effort are appreciated, further refinement is needed to better integrate the building with its context and public realm.

Key improvements include increasing setbacks from the right-of-way, enhancing pedestrian experience, and redistributing massing for a stronger design outcome. The amended conditions are supported, and with continued collaboration between the applicant and staff, the project can evolve into a more contextually responsive and lasting contribution.

**Motion**

The decision of the Board: THAT the Board APPROVE Preliminary Development Application DP-2025-00916 subject to the conditions in accordance with the Staff Committee Report dated May 11,2026 with amended condition 1.1 as shown in these minutes.

**Meeting adjourned at: 5:39 pm**