

URBAN DESIGN PANEL

The Urban Design Panel reviewed this application on November 24, 2021, and provided the following comments:

EVALUATION: SUPPORT WITH RECOMMENDATIONS (5-2)

Introduction:

Development Planner, Brenda Clark, noted this is a development permit application following rezoning for a 6-storey rental housing project at 2010 Balaclava and 3084 W 4 Ave. The site was rezoned under the Moderate Income Rental Housing Pilot Program (MIRHPP), one of 20 MIRHPP applications benefitting from additional density and height to facilitate provision of rental housing. The proposal is for 35 units, 8 of which are moderate income, with 2 studios, 3 1 Beds, and 3 2 Beds, with a rental housing agreement for 60 years.

The proposal is for a 6-storey cubic form, inset at the top floor on 3 sides, and was previously supported by Urban Design Panel at the Rezoning stage in terms of overall form on May 13, 2020. It initially went to Public Hearing on Feb 9, 2021, with 4 subsequent public hearing dates to accommodate public input. Council approved the rezoning subject to compliance with the Conditions of Development, further clarifying with amendments to require “architectural and landscape excellence” to ensure the project responded to the Kitsilano context.

The project site is located in Kitsilano, two blocks west of MacDonald. It is located within the RM-4 District, which permits multiple dwelling use, typically four-storey residential buildings with strata ownership. The areas north, east and west of the site are zoned RM-4 and contains low-rise 3 and 4 storey apartments. To the south, there are detached houses zoned RT-7, which permits a maximum development potential for multiple dwelling use of 10.7 m and 0.6 FSR.

The site consists of two lots at the southeast corner of West 4th Ave and Balaclava Street, approximately 687 m² (7,400 ft²) in size. The site is currently occupied by three duplexes built in the 1940's and renovated in the 1970's. It has no historic features, but does have existing mature trees at the northeast corner and a smaller tree at the north-west.

The Planner showed several street views of the site from West 4th Avenue, and images of extensive layered landscaping characteristic of Kitsilano, both at the adjacent Santa Barbara apartments and in the RT-7 residential character area to the south.

The site interfaces most directly with the existing Santa Barbara Apartments to the east, a complex with a courtyard aligned to face the proposed 6-storey building. A significant group of existing conifers at the northeast corner of the site assists to make the massing transition to the new building. These are City trees as they are located on the boulevard and under the jurisdiction of the Park Board.

The south interface is also of note, given there is a significant change of scale from the proposed 6 storey building to the RT-7 detached character buildings across the lane. In the Rezoning proposal, the lane frontage was largely occupied by garbage, recycling, and the ramp to the underground parking area.

Approximately 178 written comments were received along with a petition in opposition signed by 638 individuals as of November 4, 2020, with many comments regarding lack of response to neighbourhood character.

The Panel reviewed the Rezoning proposal on May 13, 2020. Staff's questions to the Panel were regarding the form, massing, height and density within the context, transition to the nearby properties, and response to neighbourhood character.

UDP generally supported the massing, form, height and density, but stated,

"The panel recognized this project as a new typology in the neighborhood, requiring architectural excellence to successfully blend into the area" and, "The project should be further developed to better integrate into Kitsilano."

UDP Recommended:

1. Pursue architectural and landscape excellence in light of the current context;
 - a. Resolve architectural expression
 - b. more neighborly color scheme
 - c. Offset new and existing windows
2. Develop a greener, more unique gardenesque edge;
 - a. Soften rigidity of landscape design; give more room for trees and stormwater detention;
 - b. Landscape buffering to improve S, E, and lane
 - c. Relocate garbage and recycling;
 - d. Enclose ramp, install green roof
3. Ensure mature tree retention;

Rezoning Conditions Included:

1. Architectural Expression (Kits Character);
 - a. Higher quality, textured materials (masonry, wood soffits); detailing to create play of light and shadow;
 - b. Softer color palette similar to immediate context; Tripartite design (base, middle, top) color to break up facades;
2. Landscaping (Kits Character)
 - a. Trees within the PL to soften the 6 storey massing; increase shrub planting;
 - b. Kitsilano character; individual unit entries; eliminate retaining walls in setbacks;
 - c. SW corner feature with large-scale tree;
 - d. Improve growing conditions with more soil volume;
3. Mature tree retention;

- a. Align parkade wall with building face to maximize tree protection (4.5 m inside PL);

In summary, architectural and landscape expression should relate more strongly to the context.

City Council approved the Rezoning, with two amendments:

“implement the Urban Design Panel’s suggestion to pursue architectural and landscape excellence to ensure the new typology provides an appropriate response to its current context”; and,

“explore changes to massing and bulk of the building, and make improvements for the transition to the south and the lanes along the single family zone by using landscape screening and buffers through the Development Permit Process.”

The Development Planner summarized the proposal maintains the same general massing and setbacks as at Rezoning, but building height was reduced slightly, balconies were shifted away from the northwest and southwest corners, and windows were vertically aligned. There is still some overlap with neighbor windows to the east at the Santa Barbara apartments.

A variety of design changes was made at the development permit stage to address public concerns and UDP recommendations at rezoning. The applicant explored use of color, materials and texture to break up the scale of the building and to be more compatible with the neighborhood, as follows:

DP Design Response:

1. Cladding and color add visual interest; break up facades;
 - a. Similar color palette as Rezoning;
 - b. Dark brick added at base;
 - c. windows aligned vertically;
 - d. Balconies shifted off NW and SW corners
2. Landscape changes:
 - a. Improved soil volume by changes to slab edge section;
 - b. Urban agriculture at south; 1 tree at SW corner;
 - c. no screening or tree planting along south PL;
 - d. Individual unit entries along Balaclava;
 - e. Garbage/recycling room inside building;
 - f. New exit stairs proposed in south and east setbacks;
 - g. Ramp enclosed; more landscaping;
3. City trees vs parkade wall location TBC by Park Board;

The setbacks remain at 10 feet along Balaclava, 12 feet along the lane, about 15 feet along W 4th Ave. Improvements to the site plan are beneficial, but further development is needed of the south setback to make a better transition to the character homes to the south. Careful selection of planting and development of edge conditions are needed to relate to the Kitsilano neighborhood. Handrail type and entry gate features need study at a larger scale.

The streetscape edge treatments include metal railings and low evergreen planting. Retaining walls have been removed. Improved planting conditions have been incorporated particularly on the west, north, and east sides of the site. The parkade edge was adjusted to provide additional soil volume to support tree and shrub planting.

The form, height and density are the same as proposed at rezoning, with a slight height reduction to 61.7 feet (18.81 m). Refinements include use of colour to break up the facades, introduction of a brick base, shifting balconies away from the North West and southwest corners, vertically aligning the windows and using colour to break up the scale and better relate to the two-storey character home to the south.

Cladding materials are similar as prop cementitious siding with glazed balconies and colourful accents.

The Development Planner showed a variety of perspective views of proposal, including the main building entry off Balaclava, the NW corner of the building facing W 4th Avenue, and view from the lane of the South Elevation, along with views of the main entry with bench and bike racks, the proposed urban agriculture area north of the lane adjacent to the PMT, and the outdoor amenity at the northwest corner of the site. The final image shows the south interface between the six-storey buildings with a character home on the south side of the lane.

Advice from the Panel on this application is sought on:

1. Does the proposal sufficiently address UDP's previous recommendations?
 - a. *Pursue architectural and landscape excellence in light of the current context;*
 - b. *Develop a greener, more unique gardenesque edge;*
 - c. *Ensure retention of existing mature trees;*
2. Does it achieve "*architectural and landscape excellence to ensure the new typology provides an appropriate response to its current context*", as required by Council?
3. What architectural and landscape design changes would most help blend the project into its Kitsilano context?

The planning team then took questions from the panel.

Applicant's Introductory Comments:

The applicant noted their intent was to respond to the various comments from previous panel and staff advice following rezoning. General comments included minimizing the height and bulk of the building. The applicant responded by working on the architectural treatment to break down the massing in various ways. The applicant noted they consulted early in the process with a structural engineer and made some concession to the interims of ceiling heights and lowered it by nearly 5 ft. In addition, the parapet height has been lowered and glass railings are introduced at the fifth floor to reduce the visual height at the parapet level.

The applicant noted they have rationalized the window pattern. The windows are better coordinated with the balconies and have color variation to give identity to different units. The brick cladding is intended to break down the massing, and introduce human-scaled textures, which relate to the Kitsilano context.

Landscape:

Arbors and gates were introduced to highlight the main entries of the ground floor units. There is a front yard garden to create a buffer between from private and public, with layered landscaping and fencing.

The applicant noted they reconfigured the parkade design to allow good soil volume to ensure long-term health of proposed trees and shrubs and to accommodate storm water on site. The applicant noted they intend to protect the trees at the northeast corner of the site.

The site includes bike racks.

The applicant team then took questions from the panel.

Panel's Consensus on Key Aspects Needing Improvement:

Having reviewed the project it was moved by **MR. DAVIES** and **MR. FRANCL** and was the decision of the Urban Design Panel:

THAT the Panel **SUPPORT** the project with the following recommendations to be reviewed by City Staff:

- Consider conflict between south facing bedroom adjacent to urban agriculture plots;
- Consider CPTED issues with the exit stairs;
- Improve landscape, fencing, gates and their integration with the overall project;
- Provide thermal comfort analysis for the suites;
- Work with staff to improve overall architectural excellence in the project design.

Related Commentary:

There were There were differing opinions regarding the architectural excellence of the project.

Some panel members noted the scale and expression of the building are well handled, and there are improvements to the architectural character of the building on all facades.

Some suggested wrapping the proportions of the north elevation to the other facades.

One panel member commented on the playfulness of the balcony design.

Other comments included there is no architectural landscape excellence.

The building lacks articulation and the material lacks direction.

Reconsider how the brick base is handled.

A panelist noted concern with heat gain due to the orientation of the building and window design during warmer days.

The east elevation of the building appears awkward, as it is proposed as a continuous façade of one material with a color change at the corner.

The masonry design is not yet integrated throughout the project.

The edge along the lane is not pedestrian-friendly and the ground condition of the edge feels underdeveloped in terms of landscaping.

A panelist noted a six-storey mass in a two to four storey neighborhood context poses challenges moving forward.

The panel noted CPTED concerns with the proposed outdoor exit stairs noting they do not work and should be included within the building envelope.

The panel noted conflicts between the community garden and the adjacent bedroom, and suggest reorienting the window to improve privacy.

Regarding landscape, the fence and pergola elements need further development. Further, study the gate design, and how to achieve more visual openness at the ground plane.

The panel noted their appreciation for the applicant's efforts to retain the trees at West 4th Avenue. The mature trees that will be retained are an important aspect to the project.

Applicant's Response:

The applicant team thanked the panel for their comments.