

## **URBAN DESIGN PANEL MINUTES**

Chair Brian Wakelin called the meeting to order at 3:05pm and noted the presence of a quorum. The panel then considered applications as scheduled for presentation.

1. Address: 688 Cambie (Vancouver Art Gallery)  
Permit No. DP-2021-00171  
Description: To develop a new 10 storey building (Passive House) consisting of social, Recreational and Cultural Use, (Library, Art Gallery, Theatre, Artist Studio), Retail Commercial Use, Childcare and ancillary office use; all over 3 below grade levels, 1 serving as a parking level.  
Zoning: DD  
Application Status: Complete Development Application  
Architect: Perkins and Will/ Herzog and De Meuron  
Staff: Hamid Shayan
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### **EVALUATION: Support with Recommendations (8/0)**

#### **Planners' Introductions:**

Development planner, Hamid Shayan, began by noting this is a proposed DP application for the new Vancouver Art Gallery, a 10-storey passive house and it will be a multi-functional art centre and community space.

The project is located on the Larwill Park site in the cultural district of the Vancouver downtown peninsula. Its boundaries are West Georgia Street to the south, Cambie Street to the west and Beatty Street to the east.

The Gallery has grown and moved three times since it first opened in 1931, with the most recent move in 1983 to the historic courthouse building on Robson Square. There is also a long history of significant planning process been recorded since 2005 when the gallery and City explored 12 sites and concluded that 688 Cambie Street is the preferred option. Later on, Council approved a cultural precinct that included a two block "Heart of the Precinct consisting of the queen Elizabeth theatre and development of 688 Cambie Street.

In 2013, the council authorized of this land under a long-term lease agreement to the Vancouver Art gallery Society, as a not- for profit organization to construct a new innovative purpose-built Art gallery under the Vancouver's Cultural plan.

The site which is currently a surface parking lot, will be divided into two parcels; the northern portion of the site which is currently occupied by 2 temporary modular housing buildings, representing one third of the total site area and will be held by the City of Vancouver for future (Commercial) development, whilst the Vancouver Art Gallery will occupy two thirds of the total site area at the south. The two parcels will be separated by a service lane.

The site is surrounded by public institutions: the Queen Elizabeth Theatre, Vancouver Public Library, Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, Vancouver Community College and the Beatty Street Drill Hall known as the Armoury. It is also located adjacent to the busy Stadium- Chinatown SkyTrain Station and the strip of crosstown restaurants on Beatty

Street. Additionally, one block further southeast are two large sports venues, BC Place and Rogers Arena.

The proposed removal of the Dunsmuir and West Georgia Street viaducts permits development of public open green space to the east. Redevelopment in this area provides opportunity for new traffic patterns. Two way traffic is proposed to replace current one way, east bound traffic along West Georgia and Dunsmuir Streets. Connections between neighbourhoods are expected to improve with the removal of the viaducts and planning for enhanced walking, cycling and driving options.

Hamid Shayan continued the new Vancouver Art Gallery comprised of 2 components: A tower building, reaches the view cone limit and expressed as a series of stacked volumes sits in the centre of a rectangular courtyard, framed by a low-rise perimeter wooden structure. At street level, the low building lines the streets and frames an open-air courtyard around the Gallery.

The courtyard is accessible through all three surrounding street facades. As a semi-public space, it is also designed to accommodate daily pedestrian flow through the site from adjacent neighbourhoods. This building also provides opportunities to create art for children and adults, students, local, national and international artists, and citizens.

This application provides required setbacks from W. Georgia and Beatty St. and proposed a 30' wide service lane to separate 2 lots. The main level, accommodated restaurant, café, bar and potential art spaces for the public use around the courtyard. The parking is at basement 3 and the atrium and other back of house use are located in basement 2 and 1.

Pedestrian walkway at Cambie Street is widened at the Georgia intersection, providing an opportunity for a double row of street trees at the outdoor gathering space at the café/bookstore interface of the gallery. The lower building also responds to the topography along West Georgia. The roofline follows the slope of the street, resulting in a building that is consistently low from one corner of the block to the next.

Development Planner, Hamid Shayan, also noted that as an additional aspect of the project's relaunch in 2021, the Architect were asked to consider the culture and history of the First Nations peoples of British Columbia in the design and materiality of the façade. Wood and copper both hold significant cultural value in the material history of British Columbia. The weaving concept has been developed in collaboration with local indigenous artists Debra Sparrow.

Advice from the Panel on this application is sought on:

**Public Realm and Landscape Strategies:**

With understanding that this building is targeted to be a future cultural landmark, Please provide feedback on the followings:

- a. Courtyard's relationship to the public realm and public /private interface especially at the W. Georgia St. and Cambie St. corner (QE Theatre Plaza). Special attention should be given on:

- Sense of openness, considered for “Heart of the Precinct” by Council and previous Urban Design Panel
- Creation of a vibrant, creative, and integrated public space
  - b. The overall performance of the courtyard as a gathering space, with special consideration on the scale and proportion, landscape arrangements, and access to daylight.
  - c. The proposed location of the entrances and their contribution to the existing pedestrian realm.

**Overall Design Development and Materiality:**

1. Does the overall architectural massing adequately respond to the urban design principles? Special consideration should be given to the increased shadow impact on the Queen Elizabeth Plaza resulted from new massing.
2. Does the proposed material treatment serve to enhance the overall Sustainable design principles and cultural references?

**Applicant’s Introductory Comments:**

The applicant began by noting there was a change in leadership with the gallery. During the process of revision, the gallery meet with the Chief of the aboriginal host nations and worked with four artist that represent the four aboriginal groups.

The goal is to create a sense of openness while activating the street with a good frontage and activation. The shape of the building is intentional to allow for light and air. The tall geometry being recessed from the City and streets allows for an open space at the bottom. The courtyard has been designed low so that it benefits from the openness.

The corner of Cambie and West Georgia is the entry to the public café and book store and allows one immediately into the program and courtyard. The sidewalks on cambie street have a wideness that spills into the public realm. There will be a gathering space outdoor that can be used for events.

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. Boniface** and **Ms. Peeroj** was the decision of the Urban Design Panel:

THAT the Panel **SUPPORTS** the project with the following recommendation to be reviewed by City Staff:

- Consider refinement of design perimeter volume to ensure connectivity and welcoming presence for all, with special attention to the SW corner;
- Consider refinement of security approach to ground plain;
- Enhance articulation of lower level volume to comment upper levels;

- Design development of rooftop treatment and porch like spaces to contribute to sustainability and programming opportunities.

**Related Commentary:**

The panel was generally supportive of the project.

Panel supported the parti of the building, the general design approach and concept.

The form and boldness of the building has been handled well.

The symmetry of the scheme is good.

The expression of the gallery boxes separated by a bottom open space is successful.

The porch light spaces are a remarkable feature of the building.

A panelist noted the relationship to Queenie square is intriguing and the urban conversation is working well. The shadows in the morning are irrelevant.

Another panelist noted the idea with the gate is problematic as Queenie plaza and CBC plaza does not close at night.

A panelist suggested to express the perimeter of the building differently, presently it is “too Vancouver” with the post and beam expression, it is very familiar.

Regarding the facades, consider could it more open up much more during the summer.

A panelist noted there is an elite attitude towards the street consider the welcoming nature of the site. There is a dialogue from the street that could benefit from opening more and/or consider the corners more.

Consider the gift shop on the corner it is quite sunken due to the grade drop, is there a way to mitigate this.

A panelist noted a one-storey plain is a bit relentless for a storefront, consider opening up more.

A panelist noted the bookstore comes out to Cambie on the sunny side while the restaurant is on the shady side.

Consider making the stair a bit more robust and placing it where people can gather and not just circulate, presently the stairs seem narrow.

The safety issues at various times of day could use more consideration.

There is more opportunity to be more ambitious with the landscaping on the courtyard.

The materiality is interesting and great opportunities have been taken advantage of  
The sustainability aspects of the project are successful.

A panelist noted there was no reference to the storm water management in the material.

**Applicant’s Response:** The applicant team thanked the panel for their comments.