

Oakridge Urban Design Vision:

The architecture of Oakridge is a response to a myriad of functional, poetic and visionary aspirations set in motion by this unique opportunity to build Vancouver's only municipal town centre outside of the downtown core.

The architectural expression is both urban and topographical, combining multiple positive attributes found in the history of cities. Fundamental principals were distilled from disparate planning movements from Ebenezer Howard's Garden City movement of the late 19th century to Le Corbusier's Radiant City. Poetic inspirations range from Italian hilltop towns to the urban street walls of Europe. Each of these precedents addressed the relationship between nature and the urban fabric.

The resulting concept is a modern street-oriented urban experience that reconnects the site to the surrounding urban context while integrating nature and topography to create an organic expression of architecture emerging from the landscape. The genesis of the design narrative begins by reintroducing the lost forest displaced by the original mall and then sculpts new retail street walls to define the perimeter of the site and the High Street within, knitting together the surrounding urban fabric. Into this new landscape are sculpted retail gallerias and public rooms which emerge and define the edges of the park above. From this foundation of parks and plazas, office and residential buildings terrace upward out of the landscape and are capped by iconic towers marking gateways capturing views in all directions.

Oakridge visitors will be citizens in a new organic micro-city connected to both downtown to the north and the airport to the south by rapid transit; inhabiting one of the most meaningful sustainable models of suburban mall redevelopments in the world.

DP4 Design Rationale:

The architectural expression of the DP4 scope of the project facilitates a gradual transition from the Oakridge buildings into the low-rise surrounding neighbourhood, serving as a gateway into the site. The corner of the West 41st Avenue and New Street is at the confluence of shifting urban scales. The Civic Centre and Social Housing tower bridge the urban scale between Buildings 3 & 4 and the surrounding low-rise neighbourhood to the west. Similarly, the Social Housing tower massing transitions to the south into a ribbon of mid-rise buildings along New Street, echoing the scale of the surrounding neighbourhood.

The curved massing of the Civic Centre delineates and embraces the at-grade Civic Park, acting not just as a pedestrian and vehicular gateway to the site along West 41st Avenue, but also from the neighbourhood to the park through its central atrium. Around the Civic Centre, active plazas and public spaces help mediate between the surrounding urban scales.

New Street Wall Buildings

As the ordering principal for the architectural tectonics of the overall site, the conceptual notion of the skin is expressed in various ways depending upon the relationship of the buildings to the park and the urban context. Skins can be draped, cut, act as a cloak or be layered to achieve differing expressions.

The buildings along New Street act as transition both programmatically and tectonically from the towers, park, and retail of the rest of the project, to the modern apartment blocks and townhouses to the southwest of the site. The buildings consist of residential down to grade with the upper levels incorporating the skin and slab vocabulary of the towers further to the east and the podium articulated by the scale of the townhouses. The Civic Centre continues this rhythm but is differentiated by scale and materiality to reflect the public nature of the building. The Social Housing tower at the corner further mediates between the taller towers along West 41st Avenue and the mid rise blocks along New Street completing the pyramid massing of the site with its apex near the Transit corner.

Park Integration

The Civic Park acts a landscaped forecourt of the Civic Centre and the interactive relationship between interior and exterior spaces is repeated on multiple levels through its terraced massing. Seniors and Youth spaces connect directly to patios overlooking the park, major program spaces such as the Library and Fitness are oriented with views over the park and Child Care spaces have access to landscaped

rooftop terraces. The building facade transparency creates a visual connection for users to the park but also acts to put on display the various program spaces on the various levels as seen from the park itself. The building and park act as extensions of each other, each putting their activities on show.

Program

The Civic Centre consists of a diversity of uses and programs, including a library, a fully functioning community centre, seniors' activity centre, youth hub, performance space, fitness centre, gymnasium, movement studio, childcare, artists studios and music rooms. Each program component came with its own distinct requirements and relationships to each other and to the surrounding urban context. The limited footprint of the site added to the complexity, by requiring the program to be stacked over multiple levels. The central atrium and stair, intersected by clear circulation paths bisecting the building, provides legibility to the mix of programs distributed on multiple levels, connecting all levels and bringing light into the heart of the building. The three main entry points at grade, from the Civic Park, West 41st Avenue and New Street, all lead visitors to the atrium and the vertical circulation provided by the central stair and elevators.

Building Expression

Various degrees of transparency reveal the interior activity of the Civic Centre and become the primary feature of its architecture and exterior expression. During the day, the building opens and reveals itself; at night, it becomes a light box, projecting its presence. The Civic Centre will be an active, open, inclusive, and diverse gathering space for the community and the glazed skin allows the varied uses and diverse populace to activate its facades and spaces.

The Civic Centre is primarily composed of glazed facades that vary in opacity depending on the level of privacy, concealment or sunshading required. Structural shear walls, storage rooms and light sensitive spaces have opaque back-painted glass spandrel. Semi-private areas, such as back of house support spaces or universal change rooms, have a medium translucency to allow light but reduce visibility from outside. Public spaces are fully transparent to maximize light and views. During the day, the building will reveal its bustling activity and welcome the community; after hours and during winter months, the building will become a glowing beacon in the park, lit by the vibrancy and activity of its users.

Gradations of Transparency

The façade design addresses the multiple, competing and varying requirements for privacy, sustainability and the mixed, stacked programs by wrapping the building in a simple glazed envelope and using gradations of ceramic frit applied to the glass to alter the transparency. The density of white frit dot pattern ranges from fully opaque with insulated spandrel to partially transparent to fully clear. The pattern is echoed in the perforated metal panel at the elevator core and rooftop mechanical enclosures. The result is a clean, consistent, glazed envelope that subtly changes to meet the functional needs of the spaces within and provides visual variety to the facade as seen from outside both during the day and at night.

This concept is applied to the residential tower through the use of similar materials, such as spandrel, vision, and translucent glass, which are layered to provide varying levels of privacy and emphasize the horizontality of the building expression.

Materiality

The quality and subtle texture proposed for the façade is reflected in the interior, a simple palette of materials emphasizing and focusing attention on the vibrant mix of programs and activities within and the surrounding park and community outside. The interiors will be layered in shades of white, similar to the exterior. Expanded metal mesh ceilings play off the dappled pattern of the frit and perforated metal panel on the exteriors and, with light fixtures above, conceal services above a consistent ceiling plane. Translucent backlit glass highlights the elevator lobbies. Punctures of colour are introduced through furniture and feature flooring in primary public gathering spaces. Wood millwork adds warmth and texture to the spaces in the form of reception desks and built in benches.