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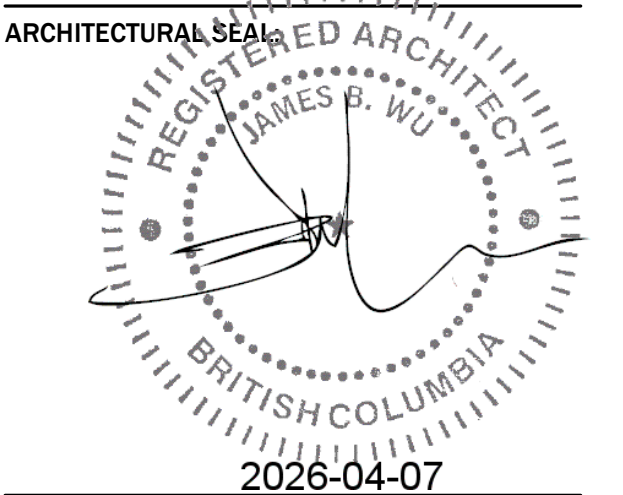
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CLIENT:

PROJECT:
80 Powell Street

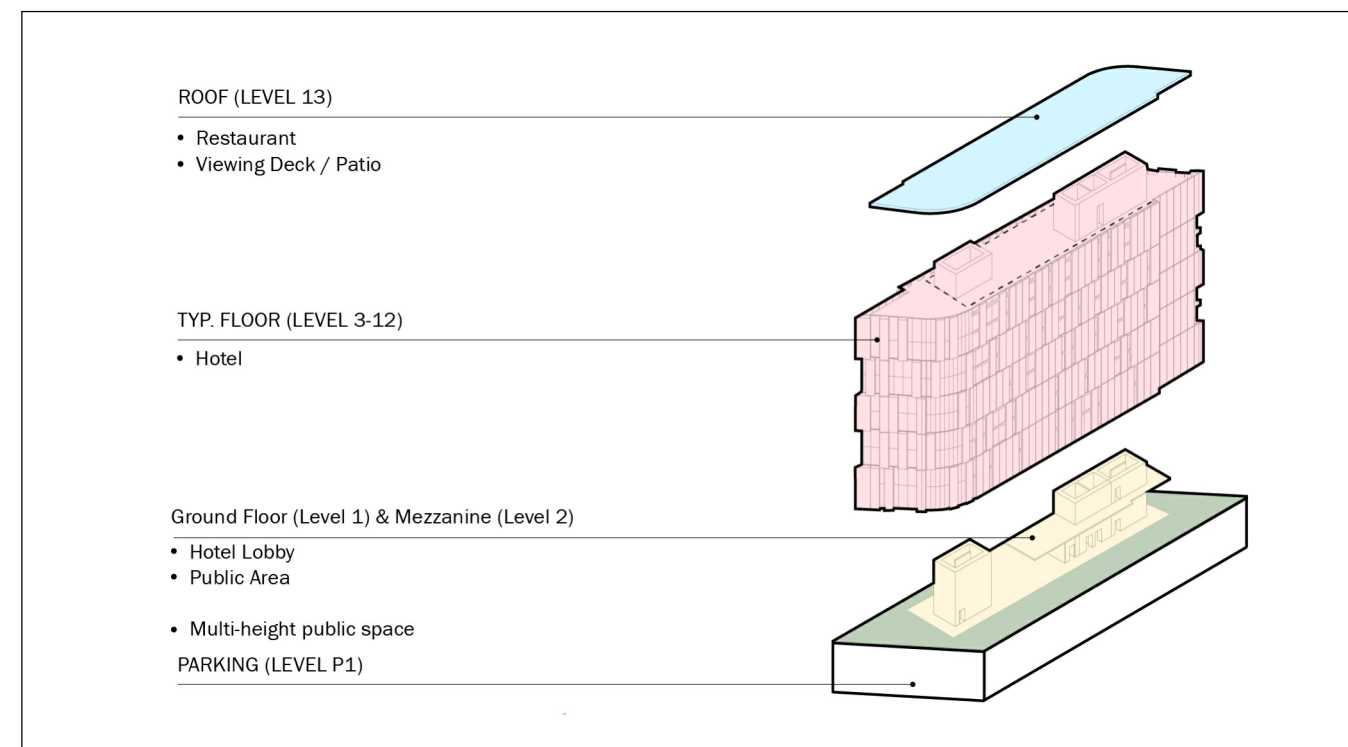
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DESIGN RATIONALE

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CHECKED: JW

PROJECT NO. **2316**

DWG. NO. **A0.1**

D.P. No:
B.P. No:



PROGRAMMING

The proposed used is a hotel, and restaurant on the top floor



PUBLIC SPACE AT GROUND LEVEL

The ground floor is designed as a highly permeable, multi-storey space, reinforcing pedestrian access and connectivity. The building is set back from the street, creating an open pedestrian realm that extends across the site from front to back, linking the street to the land and beyond. The multi-storey height amplifies the plaza's civic presence and perceived grandeur, improving the space's usability for events, gathering, and everyday activity.



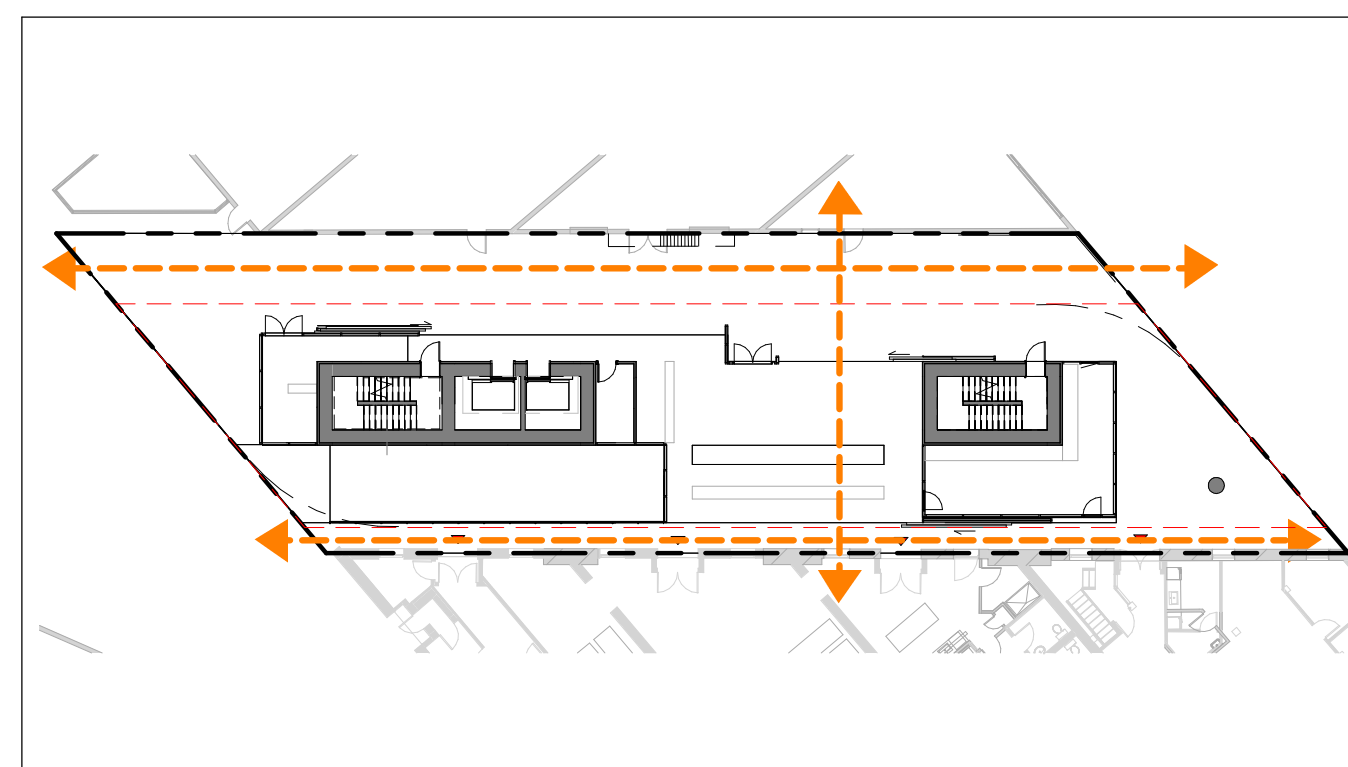
BUILDING SET BACK

The building is set back from both 211 Columbia and the building to the west, with these setbacks extending the full height of the building, rather than projecting out to the property lines above the ground floor.



TRANSPARENCY AT GROUND LEVEL

The ground floor's multi-storey space maximizes transparency, will all enclosing walls glazed to the fullest extent possible. This enhances the connection to the public realm and ensures that adjacent buildings maintain visual access to the street across the open space.



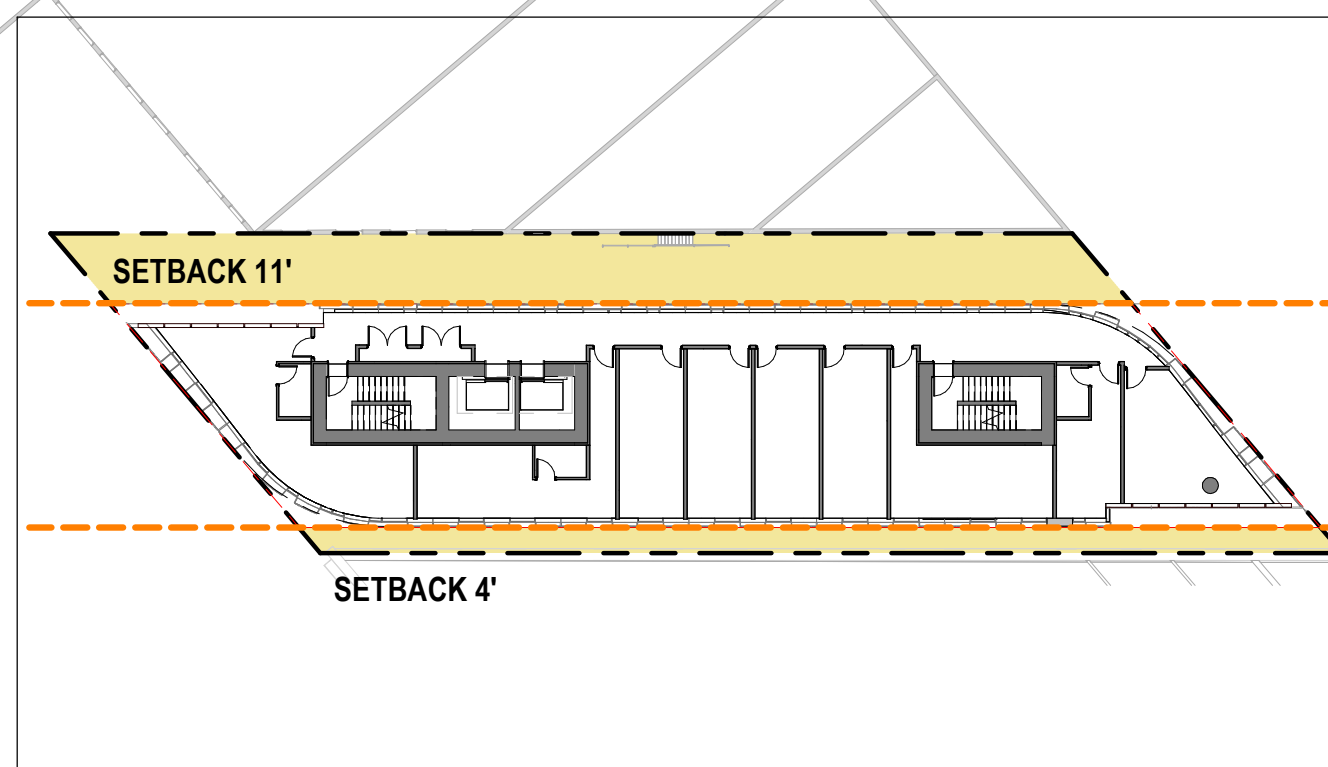
CIRCULATION ON GROUND LEVEL

The visual and physical flow across the site maintains the narrative and connection to the former CPR right-of-way, integrating the site into its historical and urban context. The hotel footprint on the ground floor is minimized to allow for maximum outdoor public amenity space.



ADJACENT VISUAL CONNECTION

Hotel room begin on the 3rd floor and above - this mitigates potential for direct overlook into adjacent buildings. The multi-storey public space allows for greater daylight penetration into the plaza - from the north and south, softening the transition between interior and exterior conditions and improving the overall sense of openness and comfort for users. This also improves sightlines from the windows of 211 Columbia Street facing the plaza (and adjacent buildings to the west), allowing for more natural surveillance, stronger visual connections, and a more animated interface between the heritage building and the new public space.



CONTINUOUS SETBACK

The design maintains physical and visual transparency through the site by preserving setbacks from adjacent buildings and incorporating a continuous front-to-back corridor on hotel floors, which is fully glazed at both ends. This corridor also reinforces the linearity of the former rail line.



MAINTAINING VISUAL TRANSPARENCY

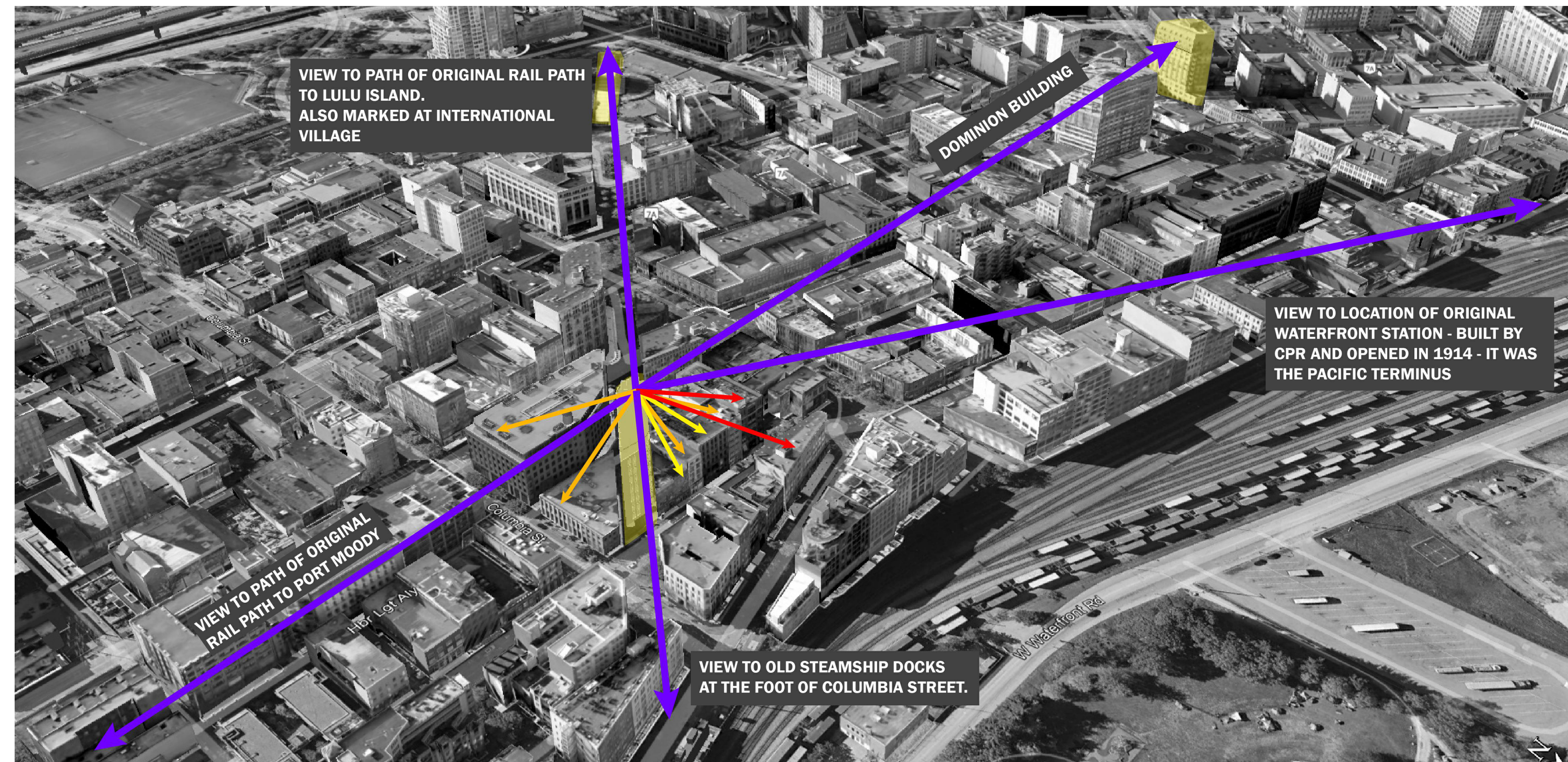
The setback and building transparency allows other buildings to the north and south to maintain sight lines across the site above the ground floor, further expressing and revealing the unique geometry of the former CPR right-of-way.



VISUAL CONNECTIONS

The ends of corridor provide guests with unique framed views of the former railway line and gastown's historic fabric, with these perspectives expanding as one ascends to higher floors.

THE TOP FLOOR IS DESIGNED AS A PUBLIC RESTAURANT SPACE, ACCESSIBLE TO BOTH HOTEL GUESTS AND THE GENERAL PUBLIC. THIS FEATURE ACTIVATES THE BUILDING AT A CIVIC LEVEL, OFFERING A UNIQUE VANTAGE POINT OVER GASTOWN AND DISTANT VIEWS TO FORMER RAILWAY DESTINATION POINTS, SUCH AS PORT MOODY AND LULU ISLAND, WHILE CELEBRATING THE SITE'S HISTORIC IMPORTANCE.



2. Project Overview

The site is located in the Gastown HA-2 zoning district, on the south side of Powell Street, Vancouver, BC. It is a surviving portion of the Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR) right of way, developed in the late 1880s and inactive since 1932.

The surrounding area features historic mid- and low-rise buildings, including former warehouses, hotels, and rooming houses, reflecting the district's diverse commercial past.

The CPR's arrival shaped Vancouver's development, influencing waterfront use, street layout, and urban growth. The right of way connected False Creek and Burrard Inlet, serving as a vital corridor for rail operations.

The proposal aims to create a new building that celebrates the historic right of way, ensuring its presence remains visible and legible.

The design aligns with the former rail corridor, providing views along the right of way and maintaining openness at ground level. Innovative materials will mark the right of way on the property and could extend into the public realm at the City's discretion.

Under the site's existing HA-2 zoning, the application is to develop a 13-storey mixed-use commercial building on site, consisting of:

- Hotel use from ground to 12th floor;
- Restaurant use on the 13th floor;
- Former railway ROW preserved and enhanced as public open space;
- A multi-storey covered public outdoor space at grade enhancing view across the site, daylighting and visibility of the adjacent heritage building;
- Plaza and vertical wall landscape reflecting elements of the site's natural state preceding railway use;
- A proposed Floor Space Ratio of 7.58 for the site;
- A proposed floor area of approximately 60,569.45 sq. ft./ 5,627.08 sq. m.;
- A proposed height of 137.5 ft./ 41.91 m;
- All over one level of underground parking, with vehicular access from the lane.

The proposal's core objective is to preserve, highlight, and celebrate the CPR right of way as a civic artifact, making it visible and accessible through thoughtful building form and landscape design.

3. Design Rationale

The design avoids pseudo-historic styles, instead introducing a contemporary form that complements Gastown's heritage buildings.

- The proposed use is HOTEL and RESTAURANT on the top floor. This use aligns with advancing the vibrancy and economy of Gastown
- The ground floor is designed as a highly permeable, double-height space, reinforcing pedestrian access and connectivity. The ground floor portion of building is set back from the street, creating an almost 20ft wide open pedestrian realm that extends across the site from front to back, linking the street to the lane – and beyond.
- To reinforce the pedestrian connection through the site, the building design elevates the lane frontage to the same level of quality, transparency, and architectural presence as the Powell Street frontage. The lane side is not treated as service or back-of-house, but rather as an equally important urban address. Both frontages are designed with consistent material expression, extensive glazing, and carefully detailed entrances, ensuring continuity of character from street to lane.
- The building is set back from both 211 Columbia and the buildings to the west, with these setbacks extending the full height of the building, rather than projecting out to the property lines above the ground floor.
- There is a 4 ft setback to 211 Columbia (east side), which reflects both the ownership relationship between the two properties and the operational relationship between the new hotel at 80 Powell and the Hotel at 211 Columbia (Levels 2 and 3 under DP-2023-007746/ BP-2025-01843 – Occupancy Permit now issued). On the west side, an 11 ft setback has been provided, aligning with the landscaped passageway and enhancing daylight access to support the success of the proposed green wall.
- The ground floor's double-height space is designed for maximum transparency, with full-height glazing on all enclosing walls. This strengthens the connection to the public realm while allowing adjacent buildings to retain clear visual access across the open space to the street. To further reinforce this transparency, the majority of the glazed walls are proposed as fully retractable systems, enabling the hotel lobby and reception to operate as a seamless indoor-outdoor space.
- The soffit above the open public space is designed to reference the historic Dominion Building—yellow terracotta. The soffit lighting will further animate the space at night, enhancing safety, legibility, and the sense of a continuous, active public realm.
- The visual and physical flow across the site maintains the narrative and connection to the former CPR right-of-way, integrating the site into its historical and urban context.
- The Hotel footprint on the ground floor is minimized to allow for maximum outdoor public amenity space.

- Hotel rooms begin on 3rd floor and above – this mitigates potential for direct overlook into adjacent buildings.

- The design maintains physical and visual transparency through the site by preserving setbacks from adjacent buildings and incorporating a continuous front-to-back corridor on hotel floors, which is fully glazed at both ends. This corridor also reinforces the linearity of the former rail line.

- The setbacks and building transparency allows other buildings to the north and south to maintain sight lines across the site above the ground floor, further expressing and revealing the unique geometry of the former CPR Right of Way.

- The ends of the corridor provide guests with unique framed views of the former railway line and Gastown's historic fabric, with these perspectives expanding as one ascends to higher floors.

- The top floor is designed as a public restaurant space, accessible to both hotel guests and the general public. This feature activates the building at a civic level, offering a unique vantage point over Gastown and distant views to former railway destination points, such as Port Moody and Lulu Island, while celebrating the site's historic importance.

- The landscape design recalls the site's rail history with embedded steel rails that trace the lines and curves of the rail spurs that once ran along the space as well as connecting to pre-rail use bog ecosystem history using a tidal water feature.

The proposed building employs a simple palette of high-quality materials, including: terracotta, steel, and glass. Together, these materials provide a contemporary architectural expression that directly links with and complements the historic character of Gastown. The HA-2 Design Guidelines encourage new architectural vocabulary that complements the heritage fabric rather than replicating it, and these materials allow for a modern interpretation while respecting the surrounding context.

Terracotta panels:

Have been specifically selected for their historic relevance and direct association with their use on the Dominion Building. In a contemporary interpretation, textured terracotta panels are employed in place of the Dominion's highly ornamental Beaux-Arts reliefs, translating the material's historic richness into a modern and restrained architectural expression.

The proposed panel pattern is also reminiscent of traditional brick and mortar coursing—reoriented vertically and expressed through texture rather than ornament. The terracotta panels provide a clean, durable, and visually refined façade that can be proportioned and detailed to respond to the vertical and horizontal rhythms characteristic of historic Gastown buildings, without mimicking historic materials or detailing.

The panels are carefully modulated to respond to the scale and pattern of adjacent façades, reinforcing a strong pedestrian-scale character at both street and lane levels.

Glass:

High levels of glazing, particularly at the ground floor and double-height spaces, maximize transparency and permeability, supporting the HA-2 objectives for active frontages and public engagement. Further, the glazing systems associated with the public realm at the ground floor and at the roof top restaurant are designed to be retracting – enabling truly seamless indoor/outdoor spaces.

Blackened Steel:

Is used to accentuate reveals between terracotta panels and other façade elements, as well as to articulate key feature components such as the main stair and elevator cores. This material selection references the ornamental steel detailing found throughout Gastown, while also recalling the steel structural frame of the Dominion and use as structural material in other Gastown buildings.

Used in a restrained and contemporary manner, the blackened steel provides contrast, depth, and precision to the façade composition, reinforcing the building's industrial lineage without resorting to literal historic replication.

Overall, the combination of materials and patterns supports the HA-2 objective of sympathetic contemporary design: new work is distinguishable from historic fabric, while referencing mass, proportion, rhythm, and materiality in a way that strengthens and enriches Gastown's heritage character

All four elevations of the building are fully expressed, reflecting its landmark siting and civic role within the HA-2 Historic Area. This contrasts with a typical Gastown infill condition, where only two primary street-facing elevations are architecturally articulated and secondary elevations are treated in a more utilitarian manner.

The requirement to design and construct four architecturally finished façades results in a materially and technically more complex building envelope, with increased costs associated with exterior materials, detailing, fenestration, and long-term durability on all sides. As a result, the building operates under different viability parameters than a conventional infill project, where reduced façade exposure allows for more economical construction assumptions. This condition is a direct outcome of the building's scale, siting, and character, and is integral to its contribution to the Gastown streetscape.

4 Heritage Context and Significance

The site is significant for its association with the CPR and its role in Gastown's development.

Key character-defining elements include:

- Its non-alignment with the city grid.
- Visibility on maps and aerial photographs.
- Angled footprints of neighbouring buildings.
- Openness allowing views through to adjacent blocks.

The property at 80 Powell Street has never been built upon which presents an opportunity to create something that stands in contrast to the existing neighbourhood much like newer additions to existing Gastown buildings which are contemporary in form and material to contrast with the original.

5. Policy + Guideline Alignment

The Gastown HA-2 Design Guidelines are long-established and highly valued, offering specific and detailed direction for the rehabilitation and conservation of existing heritage buildings. This project, however, is not a rehabilitation or retention initiative—it is a new development. For such projects, the guidelines are broader in scope and intentionally allow for interpretive design latitude. Importantly, they state: “a new architectural vocabulary is encouraged that complements the heritage character of original Gastown buildings”.

This site is one of the few remaining vacant parcels in Gastown. It has never been developed, apart from a single rail line that once crossed it for a limited period. Rail infrastructure, however, was central to Vancouver’s early history. As a GHAPC report to Council noted in 2001 regarding Gastown’s national heritage status: “The history of Gastown is the history of the arrival of the transcontinental railway on the west coast of Canada.”

Although the rail line through Gastown no longer exists, it left a strong imprint in the subdivision pattern: a visible diagonal alignment of lots cutting north–south across the eastern side of Gastown. Many of these lots are now landscaped and closed to public access. This project may be a final opportunity to acknowledge that legacy and to use the site’s vacant condition to: “achieve a balance between the compatibility of new work and its distinguishability from authentic heritage fabric. Understanding this balance can lead to sympathetic and creative design solutions which strengthen and enrich the heritage character of the area.”

While the guidelines do not specifically reference the former rail corridor, they clearly provide direction for new development. Design flexibility lies within the following guideline provisions:

“The intent of the design guidelines is to conserve the authentic heritage character and fabric of Gastown and to ensure that new development is supportive of and harmonious with the area’s heritage character. Consequently, specific guidelines are included for the rehabilitation of heritage buildings and for the contextual design of new structures.”

“The objective that underlies this document is that appropriate design guidelines will encourage the conservation of the authentic heritage character and fabric of Gastown and will also ensure that new development is compatible with and will contribute to that character.

New buildings should not be designed in a pseudo-historic style, replicate existing buildings, or buildings that once existed, as this erodes the value of authentic heritage buildings. Rather, a new architectural vocabulary is encouraged that complements the heritage character of original Gastown buildings. This can be done by respecting and interpreting patterns of massing, height, fenestration, facade proportions and organization, materials and colour in the prevailing character of significant buildings in the area. Non-architectural elements such as signs, awnings, canopies and sidewalk displays can further enhance the character and interest of the area.”

The unique character of the site dictates a unique response. This site presents an opportunity to create something that stands in contrast to the existing neighbourhood much like newer additions to existing Gastown buildings which are contemporary in form and material in contrast to the original. This combined with the site’s off grid orientation within the context of Gastown will create a distinct urban form that highlights and marks the former right-of-way and its significance.

The building’s design celebrates the historic right-of-way, ensuring its presence remains visible and legible:

- Its orientation aligns with the former rail corridor, creating views along the right of way through each end of the site.
- At ground level, the double height space provides a unique sense of openness and transparency to the ground plane while the generous separation with the neighbouring buildings on the western edge will provide a clear and distinct view through the site.
- The building’s urban form will serve as a marker of this historic feature, ensuring that the site’s past is integrated into its future.
- At sidewalk level, attention is drawn to the site through the innovative use of materials to mark the right of way on the property and beyond into the public realm.

Guideline Related to Gastown Influences

The heritage consultant’s report emphasizes both the HA-2 Design Guidelines and other specific significant Gastown character and historical elements. Together, these influences informed the design direction, creating an exceptional opportunity to recognize the site and reinforce the greater Gastown historical and heritage fabric while contributing to the vibrancy and economic growth of Gastown.

- **Historic Rail Use:** The site’s railway past and its diagonal geometry inspired the siting, massing, and form.
- **Pre-Rail Landscape:** The site’s earlier history is acknowledged through thoughtful landscape composition.
- **Gateway Buildings:** Gastown’s western gateway is marked by the 1910 Dominion Building the tallest in the district. The Dominion Building represents a deliberate exception to the dominant warehouse typology in terms of scale, siting, and character. Its vertical massing, civic orientation, and architectural expression reflect the evolution of Gastown from an industrial waterfront district toward a broader commercial and financial centre, enriching the district’s layered historical character rather than replicating its warehouse form.
- **Gateway Buildings:** This project, at the recognized eastern gateway, creates a counterpart: a 21st-century building of modern design – matching the Dominion Building as a deliberate exception to the dominant warehouse typology in terms of scale, siting, and character. However, remains respectful of its context yet distinct from the Dominion’s historic expression.
- **Public Realm Improvements:** The City’s current Gastown public realm initiatives provide opportunities to extend the project’s landscape design into the adjacent streetscape, reinforcing the east gateway presence.

	DOMINION BUILDING	TYPICAL GASTOWN	PROPOSED BUILDING
Original purpose	Financial / commercial office building (Imperial & Dominion Trust)	Storage, wholesale, and goods distribution	Hotel and Restaurant
Urban role	Civic landmark and gateway between Gastown and downtown; faces Victory Square	Part of a continuous industrial streetscape tied to port and rail	Civic landmark and eastern gateway to Gastown
Building type	Early high-rise office tower	Low–mid rise industrial warehouse	Contemporary mid rise
Structural system	Steel-frame (Chicago-style), concrete floors	Heavy timber post-and-beam and/or load-bearing masonry	Concrete
Height & massing	13 storeys; vertical emphasis	Typically 3–7 storeys; horizontal, block-like massing	13 Storeys; vertical and/or horizontal emphasis depending on view point
Architectural style	Second Empire / Beaux-Arts with classical detailing Monumental—designed as a landmark	Romanesque Revival or utilitarian industrial Utilitarian and repetitive—designed for function	Contemporary/ Modern Monumental—designed as a landmark
Roof form	Curved steel mansard roof (highly distinctive)	Flat or very shallow pitched roof	Distinctive – flat roof. Intended to be open/transparent – similar to ground plane
Façade expression	All elevations architecturally expressed with ornament, fenestration, and material variation Ornamental: columns, terracotta spandrels, strong vertical articulation.	Typically one or two primary façades; secondary elevations treated plainly Repetitive punched windows, minimal ornamentation	All elevations architecturally expressed Repetitive windows and cladding panels used with varied spacing. Restrained articulation.
Interior layout	Central core with ten-storey spiral stair; smaller office plates	Large open floor plates for storage and handling	Main structural cores with small floor plates
Relationship to transport	Oriented to streets and civic space	Oriented to rail spurs, loading bays, and former waterfront	Oriented to former rail line and open civic connecting space
Heritage significance	Symbol of civic ambition; Vancouver’s first steel-framed high-rise	Collective expression of Gastown’s port-industrial history	Marker of former rail line with connecting open space and non-alignment to city grid
Overall character	Monumental, representational, landmark-driven	Utilitarian, repetitive, function-driven	Gateway building-landmark-driven