

URBAN DESIGN PANEL MINUTES

DATE: September 9, 2015

TIME: 4.00 pm

PLACE: Sun Room, Robson Square

PRESENT: MEMBERS OF THE URBAN DESIGN PANEL:
Russell Acton
Stefan Aepli
Meghan Cree-Smith
Ken Larsson
Jennifer Marshall
Roger Hughes
Muneesh Sharma

REGRETS: Matthew Soules
Stuart Hood
Neil LaMontagne
Arno Matis
Chris Mramor
Julien Fagnan

**RECORDING
SECRETARY:** Lidia McLeod

ITEMS REVIEWED AT THIS MEETING	
1.	89 Nelson Street (998 Expo Boulevard)
1.	22 E 5 th Avenue

BUSINESS MEETING

Chair Marshall called the meeting to order at 4:00 p.m. and noted the presence of a quorum. After a brief business meeting the panel considered applications as scheduled for presentation.

1. Address: 89 Nelson Street (998 Expo Boulevard)
DE: 419255
Description: To construct a 29-storey mixed-use building containing a total of 588 residential units with commercial at grade.
Zoning: CD-1
Application Status: Complete Development Application
Review: Second
Architect: Francl Architecture (Walter Francl)
Owner: One West Holdings Ltd.
Delegation: Walter Francl, Francl Architecture
Alain Prince, Francl Architecture
Chris Phillips, PFS Studio
Peter Webb, Concord Pacific
Staff: Paul Cheng

EVALUATION: SUPPORT (4-1)

- **Introduction:** Paul Cheng, Development Planner, introduced the proposed building as a dramatic change in form of development from the design approved in the CD-1 By-Law. Planning has always envisioned a pedestrian thoroughfare through 3A/3B, but new vehicular accesses have also been proposed.

This is a unique, triangle-shaped site which is situated to allow prominence as a termination view when moving eastward along Pacific/Expo, or northward along the Cambie Bridge. It is bordered by two bridge ramps and a major arterial that serve as main access conduits to downtown Vancouver for motor vehicles, cyclists and pedestrians. The elevated nature of two of these roads inherently introduces a shift in scale that is different, and larger, than a more typical street block.

Some of the most notable viewpoints for this building are from the experience of the motorist. This includes the long approach when moving eastward along Expo Boulevard, which would imply a much quicker-paced experience of the building when approaching and passing by it. Similar to the experience of BC Place when driving by on the viaducts, the building needs only to communicate to those in cars on a large scale.

However, BC Place can also be considered a poor response to the slower modes of transportation such as cycling and walking. For the site in question, staff feel that the pedestrian and the cyclist experience should also be considered as equally important. These modes of transport imply a much slower pace of approach, and therefore challenges the building be more interactive throughout the pedestrian's approach and for further consideration where stopping on the sidewalk to get a better look is a possibility.

From a distance, the proposal could be considered an interesting, well-balanced sculptural composition in space as it needs not relate to the human body. However, the perspective change as a person gets closer to the building should also be considered.

Advice from the Panel on this application is sought on the following:

1. Since the project proposes a different Form of Development from what was approved in the CD-1, is the proposal an improved form of development for this site, taking into consideration the unique adjacencies of the site to major bridge and vehicular infrastructure?
 2. Does the proposal successfully achieve sufficient visual and architectural interest, in a sequence of changing scales, as one approaches it:
 - a. When moving eastward along Expo/Pacific; and
 - b. When moving northward along Cambie Bridge;
 3. Given the greater number of opportunities to view this building within an urban context, from a great variety of distances ranging from the directly-adjacent sidewalk to from the other side of False Creek, does the proposal achieve an architectural richness from all of these aspects? Factors to consider include, but are not limited to: modulation, changes in scale, cadence, materiality, colour, texture and light/shadow
 4. Please provide commentary on the proposed public realm through and around the site, as well as the interfacing of the building to the public realm.
- **Applicant's Introductory Comments:** The applicant team noted that they explored numerous options and felt this proposal was an appropriate solution for the idiosyncratic site.

This is an island site, and it stands as a discrete but coherent whole - an isolated triangle of the city. The perimeters of the site are odd bits of urban fabric which create an opportunity for doing something special.

The building's shape and sense of movement reference the surrounding streets and off-ramps. The undulation and flow of the building form and facades also reference the wind and water elements of the surrounding geography. The motion of the balcony skin is meant to capture the allegory that is the nature of Vancouver. The east of the building is a prow in the confluence of two streams of traffic, and references the height of an adjacent building. The protrusions and undulations bring a life to the building as one passes the building at grade.

Located in the joint between the two building masses spanning 60 ft. approx., the amenity spaces are in a premiere character location and are also opened up in an effort to allow the creation of a public art venue. The soffit of the amenity space will be illuminated and give the building glow in the evening.

The commercial space at the base fronts onto Expo and Nelson, as well as open onto an internal plaza. The lobbies also front onto this plaza. There is currently Engineering approval for a parking ramp off of Expo Boulevard; but there a pending request with Engineering to move this ramp further north to improve the ground plane organization and street frontages.

There is a requirement to meet LEED silver, which will be exceeded. The building will also be district energy ready. As well, all of the parking stalls in the building are electric vehicle charge-ready.

As this is a unique site, a unique approach has been taken with regards to landscaping. The design has been looked at in five layers, in order to create a strong unified place within the pedestrian realm. The floor is introduced first giving a general sense of form and massing. Patterning was then introduced to add a sense of flow to the site. The idea of glow is to illuminate the space and emphasize the mid-block movement through the site. Furnishings include kiosks allow enhancement of connectivity. The tree canopy provides a roof of texture and green within the space. Ceilings are important as they help to play up the public realm experience. The complexity of this attitude helps to make this an engaging and permeable site. Bike share space and a path also exist within the site.

The applicant team then took questions from the panel.

- **Panel's Consensus on Key Aspects Needing Improvement:**

- Reconsider colour palette - especially in conjunction with overly dark neighbour (One Pacific)
- Design development needed to the retail base and lobbies to improve activation of the street and internal plaza.
- Design development of the portal in keeping with the design level of the whole building.
- Parts of the project seems to be too heavy and massive - a careful look is needed at the form to prevent it from looming.
- Detail is key to the successful development of the design.

- **Related Commentary:**

Form + Massing:

The panel noted that the building has a strong and dramatic architectural form. The building also has a refreshing simplicity compared to other buildings in the area, and is an improvement to other CD-1 forms. It fits in well with the urban fabric and surrounding areas, and successfully achieves visual interest.

While the rationale of the massing up against the bridge is understandable, attention needs to be paid to creating a hospitable environment in light of this.

Façade Treatment:

The façade treatment is a bit subtle and could use more modulation. Pumping up the balcony expressions would help this and create more beauty. Overall more detail is needed as the detail and quality of the balconies and overhangs will determine the delight of this building.

The portals appear sawn out of the mass with little attention to activation or detail. It needs to be brought up to the same quality and design level as the rest of the building.

Ground Plane Treatment:

The development of the ground plane is all flow with no eddies; people need to be gathered and engaged in the plaza spaces. Generally the design of the public realm is acceptable, but attention should be paid to how people will occupy it. More thought should be given on how to make the lobby entrances more inviting.

Retail:

The continuous retail at grade as proposed is monotonous and needs to be developed to be more convincing, the street needs to be activated. Perhaps finer development is needed to activate the edges.

Attention needs to be paid to the colour so that the building seems joyful rather than oppressive.

The lighting on the floor is great and the glow against the building will look good. It is important not to over-complicate the lighting though, so as not to distract drivers going past at night. This area also suffers from overlighting at night (the stadium), so consideration should be given to light pollution measures

- **Applicant's Response:** The applicants thanked the panel and noted that the comments were very perceptive, especially those about the portal.

2. Address:	22 E 5th Avenue
DE:	419206
Description:	To construct a new six-storey building with office uses, while retaining the existing one-storey building and providing service and manufacturing (with accessory retail) uses under a heritage revitalization agreement with interior and exterior alterations
Zoning:	I-1
Application Status:	Complete Development Application
Review:	First
Architect:	Christopher Bozyk Architects (Nick Bray)
Owner:	PC Urban 22 E 5 th Ave Holdings
Delegation:	Chris Bozyk, Francl Architecture Nick Bray, C.B.A Patricia Campbell, PMG Landscape Architects David Fawley, PC Urban 22 E 5 th Ave Holdings
Staff:	Marie Linehan

EVALUATION: NON-SUPPORT (2-4)

- **Introduction:** Marie Linehan, Development Planner, introduced the site as being in the I-1 zone in the Mount Pleasant industrial area at the corner of East 5th Avenue and Ontario Street.

The existing building was built in 1942 as an electrical parts manufacturing building. The exterior walls are poured in-place board-formed concrete walls with Art Deco details. The building has been reviewed by the Vancouver Heritage Commission and is eligible for Heritage B status.

The proposal is to retain and restore the existing facade under the heritage revitalization agreement, and to build a new six-storey building at the interior. Under the I-1 zoning the uses at the ground floor may be a variety of service and light industrial with accessory retail uses. The upper storeys are office use.

There is a significant grade change on the site, with the lane being higher than the street. The site slopes up about 7ft. along Ontario Street, and an additional 7ft. along the lane for a total grade change of just under 14ft. corner to corner. Parking is accessed from the low end of the lane with a half a level of parking at the rear of the ground floor. Parking is also accessed from the high end of the lane to provide an interstitial level of parking at the second floor.

The permitted density in I-1 is 3.0 FSR with further limitations on office use. The proposal is compliant for the overall density of 3.0 FSR for industrial and office uses combined, but is seeking a relaxation to provide a larger percentage of office use; with industrial use at 0.5 FSR and office use at 2.5 FSR. The proposal is also seeking exclusion for the above grade parking at the 2nd floor.

During pre-application staff encouraged the upper story massing to be located significantly setback from the corner so that the volume of the original building continues to read with more prominence at the corner. Therefore, as the massing is pushed to the interior there is also a height relaxation. The permitted height in I-1 is 60ft., and the proposal is about 80ft. at the front and 70ft. at the rear. Staff do not anticipate view impacts as there are no residential uses permitted in I-1, and the nearest mixed and residential zones are significantly higher along up Ontario Street at Broadway and south of Broadway.

Advice from the Panel on this application is sought on the following:

1. Overall height, massing and density, noting the height relaxation
 2. Overall building design, including the parking strategy
 3. Relationship to the existing Heritage B building
- **Applicant's Introductory Comments:** The applicant thanked the panel and noted that the original design did not retain the existing building and was very pedestrian and ordinary. Staff advised the applicant about the heritage component and a very interesting history. As such it was a challenge to preserve the key elements of the existing building.

The massing and height were arrived at through a lot of consultation with staff due to the grade differential across the site. The additional height is a product of the applicant's density requirement for the site and in light of the setback to the new building. As the area has a lot of industry, a nod to this has been used in the building's expression. Lighting is used at night to announce the building as a revitalization project in the area.

A glass box has been used to contrast with the concrete podium of the original building, and the strength of the existing building. At the pedestrian level, it will be quite welcoming. An animated corner with a lot of pedestrian interaction is preferable, which creates the opportunity for a cafe or accessory retail.

Inside the boulevard at the edge is simple landscaping, and a pixel pattern has been used in the paving to reflect the building design. Boulevard trees exist and are being retained. Landscaping is being used to mark the entrances off of Ontario and 5th Avenue.

- **Panel's Consensus on Key Aspects Needing Improvement:**
 - There is general concern about height, but it may be acceptable if massing is developed differently
 - The pixel concept should be more emphatic and evolved - more work is needed to differentiate the pixel pattern from the base
 - Underground parking should be incorporated
 - On the south and west facing facades there is serious heat-gain issues: passive sustainability measures need to be incorporated into the design of the building.
 - Design development on the roofs to activate and integrate them more with the building
- **Related Commentary:** The panel noted that overall the design is a positive approach, and the heritage façade is well-handled. This re-use of a heritage industrial building is supportable and the idea of it as an office space is exciting.

The height and density may be acceptable if it can be proven that they don't cut into the views from the surrounding public realm. However, the new addition looks too massive. The massing of the new sets off the base and, while interesting, would be better if it could be compressed. While the parking strategy functions well above grade, there is not a good rationale for it, and it compromises the expression of the pure cube of the building. The panel recommends relooking at the parking to suppress it below grade.

Really accentuating the glass box might help with the argument for the square on top. The setbacks also seem under-utilized, and the roof could be more activated for occupants along Ontario Street.

The preservation of the heritage façade has been handled well, but there would be a more positive relationship with the heritage component if the addition was not a four-storey box. If the cube was dematerialized and a bit squatter it would have a better relationship with the heritage base.

While the playful scheme is good, the colours are quite distracting and seems to overpower the heritage building. As well, if the desired effect is 'pixelated' then the design really needs to emphasize this. It would be better if the pixels could be better emphasized, and juxtaposed with the heritage architecture.

- **Applicant's Response:** The applicant thanked the panel and noted that the comments will be taken into advisement. They are open to revisiting the setbacks, but felt that some of their solutions were obvious responses to the neighbourhood and so did not include their justification in the presentation. This project is meant to provide a better urban design than the adjacent building which creates an abrupt end to the street.

Adjournment

There being no further business the meeting adjourned at 6:34 p.m.