

URBAN DESIGN PANEL MINUTES

DATE: June 18, 2014
TIME: 4.00 pm
PLACE: Town Hall Meeting Room, City Hall
PRESENT: MEMBERS OF THE URBAN DESIGN PANEL:
Greg Bellerby
Walter Francl
David Grigg
Joseph Hruda
Jennifer Marshall
Chris Mramor
Maurice Pez (Chair)

REGRETS:
Ryan Bragg
Joseph Fry
Arno Matis
Phil Mondor
Goran Ostojic
Matthew Soules

**RECORDING
SECRETARY:** Lorna Harvey

ITEMS REVIEWED AT THIS MEETING

1. East Fraser Lands Workshop (Area 1 Town Square and Parcels 15, 16.1, 17, 18.1)
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BUSINESS MEETING

Chair Pez called the meeting to order at 4:10 p.m. and noted the presence of a quorum. There was a brief business meeting and then the Panel considered applications as scheduled for presentation.

1. Address: East Fraser Lands Workshop - Area 1 Town Square and Parcels 15, 16.1, 17, 18.1
- DE: N/A
- Description: Workshop to discuss evolving design for East Fraser Lands Area 1 Town Square and Parcels 15, 16.1, 17 and 18.1.
- Zoning: CD-1
- Application Status: N/A
- Review: First
- Architect: Town Square: Margot Long and Chris Sterry, PWL Partnership
Parcel 15: Stu Lyon and Paul Goodwin, GBL Architects
Parcel 16.1 and 18.1: Taizo Yamamoto, Yamamoto Architecture
Parcel 17: Martin Bruckner and Gwyn Vose, IBI Group
Beau Jarvis, Wesgroup
Robin Petri, Wesgroup
- Owner: Wesgroup
- Staff: Pat St. Michel

EVALUATION:

- **Introduction:** Pat St. Michel, Development Planner, introduced the workshop as an opportunity to gain comprehensive advice from the Panel and their input into the evolving designs of the Town Square area of East Fraser Lands, or the River District, prior to submitting for a development permit in the fall. Ms. St. Michel gave a history of the area noting that the plan for the East Fraser Lands was the result of many years of consultation and design from policy to ODP to area rezonings that was passed by Council at public hearings in 2008 and 2010. The River District is located in the southeast corner of Vancouver between Kerr Street and Boundary Road, Marine Drive and the Fraser River. Ms. St. Michel mentioned that there will be over 25 acres of park along with residential, retail, a community centre, a school and several childcare centres. There are three residential neighbourhoods shaped by two green corridors that extend back from the continuous public shoreline and river front park. As well a Canadian Pacific rail line bisects the site.

Area One - Central Neighbourhood:

The Town Square is located in this area which is the higher density mixed-use neighbourhood that will be the heart of the district. This area was rezoned in 2008 and was intended to be the first phase of the development. However, the recession did not support the construction of the higher density mixed-use developments envisioned for this area. Subsequently Area 2 (Western Neighbourhood) was rezoned in 2010 to enable lower density, and in particular, wood-frame construction to proceed. To date, all development in the River District has been in Area Two. Ms. St. Michel reminded the Panel that they had recently reviewed the development permit proposal for Parcel 5B, a low-rise and mid-rise 11-storey residential development.

Town Square:

Wesgroup and Parklane Development are initiating development of the mixed-use central neighbourhood with the four projects and associated public realm that together form the Town Square. The Town Square will be an important public gathering place and the focus of shopping for the area. It will include a major grocery store as well as local-serving shops

and restaurants. The Town Square is located between Marine Way and the rail line at the intersection of the High Street and The Crescent. The High Street is a shopping street which will lead down to the riverfront and will be an important public place and focus of the area. An interesting challenge to note is that since the rezoning of Area One, Flood Control Levels have increased by over a meter. Building grades and streets have been raised to reflect this, but the rail line elevation remains constant, creating a challenge for addressing grade change with commercial frontage. Along the north side of the rail line will be a pedestrian greenway and off-street bicycle route.

Ms. St. Michel reminded the Panel that their presentation materials contain the public realm plan for the Town Square and a package for each of the four buildings that shape the square (Parcels 15, 16.1, 17.1 and 18). The package also included excerpts from the Council (approved Guidelines for the area) which included concept plans for the public realm as well as the surrounding buildings. The plans are intended as a guide and a demonstration of how the design principles, densities and building forms can be achieved, and the preliminary design reviewed by the Panel are consistent with what the zoning supports. Ms. St. Michel asked the Panel to comment on how well the evolving designs responded to the Guidelines, and where there is change, is it an improvement over what is in the Guideline document. She noted that the model reflected the building massing and the Town Square configuration from the 2008 Guidelines. With respect to character and design approach, the Guidelines ask that the buildings reflect the industrial past of the site and the working river.

Ms. St. Michel gave a description of the proposal noting that the development sites are all mixed-use with retail at grade. Parcels 15 and 17 are the two higher density parcels with towers of 17 and 19-storeys. She added that the tallest buildings in the future will be 24-storeys and just to the east of Parcel 16.1 and 18.1). Larger scale retail will be at the base of these two parcels with a grocery store at the base of Parcel 17. The largest public space will be on the southwest corner of Parcel 17 and Parcels 16.1 and 18.1 at the southern edge of the Town Square will be 4-storey wood frame buildings.

Ms. St. Michel mentioned that some of the bigger changes in presentations by the applicants will include:

- Reorientation and enlargement of the Town Square to engage a portion of the corners of all four development sites.
- A slight shift westward of the tower on Parcel 15 to improve sunlight access on the square and enlarge its presence on the parcel, and the introduction of this angle into the building form.
- A change in the approach to the massing of Parcel 17 from a 4-storey to a 5-storey perimeter block form to a 10-storey mid-rise, a more open podium, and a free-standing amenity building.
- A more open angle to the buildings of Parcel 16.1 and 18.1 to become part of the square and strategies to address the elevation changes from Flood Control Levels.

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

- The reconfiguration of the proposed town square to engage the four surrounding parcels and the proposed approach to organizing elements within this space.
- Relative importance of different element in the town square.
- The proposed reorganization and massing on Parcel 17, going from a low-rise perimeter block form to a mid-rise 11-storey building with a more open elevated courtyard.
- Adaptation and transition to the new Flood Control Level on Parcel 16.1 and 18.1.
- General direction of the architecture in each of the buildings with respect to the guidelines and reflection of the industrial past and working river history of the site.

Ms. St. Michel took questions from the Panel.

- **Applicant's Introductory Comments:**

Town Square: Margot Long, Landscape Architect, gave a power point presentation and mentioned that they are using the Town Square as a unifying element for the site. She said the client group is looking to have the square as a unique and distinctive plaza that helps build community. They also looked at what might happen in the future and reinforced the plaza design to be flexible for different kinds of uses. There could be any number of events in the square such as farmer's markets or food truck festivals, Friday evening movie nights and art displays. There are two themes for the entire site; one is the working river and the other is the song bird strategy. The plaza has been skewed from the original design to allow for better views to the river, more sunlight access and reinforces the retail edges. When they were looking at the elements for the plaza they looked at trees, lighting, water and paving. They determined that putting the trees in groups reinforced the song bird strategy. They also looked at a new way of doing lights with twinkle lights from building edge to building edge in addition to the catenary lights. Ms. Long mentioned that they wanted to bring the plaza down to the greenway where a lot of pedestrian traffic will be happening. She described the grade change noting that it is challenging particularly for the retail. In describing the elements in the plaza Ms. Long noted the seating areas and the water feature with bubblers that can be turned off in the winter. There will be parking on all the street edges and a bus stop.

Parcel 15: Stu Lyon, Architect, gave a power point presentation and mentioned that the building has frontages on High Street, the Town Square and the Crescent. The entry to the High Street will anchor the east corner of the Town Square with a 17-storey tower. Some Density has been moved away from Marine Drive to the High Street and Crescent frontages. The ground floor and private outdoor space along Marine Way are for residential uses and will be raised above the sidewalk to provide a comfortable separation from the street. There will be garden decks over the ground floor commercial providing a lush green semi-private outdoor amenity for residents. As well there are private garden patios at the perimeter and garden plots in the centre to take full advantage of the space. The lane on the west provides access for both the commercial and residential loading as well as the underground parking ramp. The east facing building frontage at the base and in the tower has been angled to reflect the new orientation of the Town Square. Elements in the building at the lower levels will reflect the piles of the Fraser River.

Parcel 16.1 and 18.1: Taizo Yamamoto, Architect, gave a Power Point presentation and noted that Parcel 16.1 has a high exposure from Crescent Street. Townhouses front the south giving a neighbourhood character to the adjacent Greenway. The northeast corner completes the Town Square perimeter. There will be an anchor store at the east end of the block and accessed from High Street. A mid-block court provides pedestrian and vehicular access with a ramp west of the court for access to the underground parking. Semi-private gardens are at grade and garden decks above anchor the store. Mr. Yamamoto noted that commercial and residential uses are included.

Regarding Parcel 18.1, Mr. Yamamoto mentioned that this 5 -storey building has a strong urban character. The south frontage gives a strong definition to Kent Avenue with townhouse forms extending the neighbourhood character. The mid-block court is similar to parcel 16.1 and is flanked by semi-private garden spaces. As well, a variety of pedestrian routes through the block offer good permeability. The High Street frontage is angled to open the view from the Town Square to High Street. As well both commercial and residential units are included.

Both buildings have been splayed to open out views to the river and to make these buildings feel more like part of the town square. Raised exterior areas work with the grade change and create opportunities for outdoor seating, and cantilevered deck elements, with potential water features. Wood decking carries up the facades of the buildings. Both buildings play upon the river - one by drawing on the idea of fish scales, the other referencing the geometries of the log booms on the river. The upper levels are designed with a strong sense of horizontality, and of 'floating' above the lower levels.

Parcel 17: Martin Bruckner, Architect, gave a Power Point presentation and noted that this building defines the precinct's key outdoor space with a strong streetwall and an 18-storey tower. The vibrancy of the Town Square is supported with generous, sunny areas for outdoor seating, food and beverage uses in the surrounding retail spaces. The grocery store entry will be from the Town Square near the Crescent frontage. The building massing has been reallocated to a 10 storey mid-rise creating a more open landscaped roof deck garden. An amenity building for the residents of the four parcels is situated in the highly visible corner adjacent to the town square. The north face of the building along Marine way is wrapped with two storey townhouse units. The tower form reflects the orientation of the town square in strong horizontal balcony elements. Large scale beams and columns at the lower levels reference the former industrial nature of the site.

The applicant teams took questions from the Panel.

- **Consensus:**

- Support for the reshaping of the plaza since the original master plan, the working river theme and general design approach. Catenary lighting is an important element in the space. The separated bike path is not supported because of the impacts on the pedestrian space.
- Support for the massing changes to Parcel 17 with the introduction of the north/south midrise building, and the introduction of an amenity building at the eastern edge of the square.
- The grade change alongside Parcel 16 and 18 is a unique opportunity for a special retail edge and transitions to this space should be further developed.
- Concern regarding the location of the tower on Parcel 15 and the impacts on evening sun on the town square. The tower should be relocated.
- Architecturally, an authentic and robust response is needed, particularly at the lower and podium levels. At upper levels buildings can be straight forward. Materiality is important.

- **Related Commentary:**

- The panel commended the design development of the townsquare, the reorientation and the continuous variation of 'ad hoc' spaces it creates, the engagement of all four corners and the visual connection and references to the river.
- Sidewalks and other elements approaching plaza should be more typical to emphasize the uniqueness of the town square treatment. Deemphasize curbs and bulges that reinforce the road. Emphasis should be placed on pedestrians, and a bike path should not take away from pedestrian space and pedestrian connectivity across the space.
- Catenary lights are a really good device that will make this a unique place in the city.
- The introduction of water is a good idea.
- The looser cluster planting is the right approach.
- A mid-block pedestrian crossing is needed at the north end of the plaza.
- To create a sense of place the retail has to work. Viability in the short term is an important consideration to ensure success. At first it will have to function as

- destination retail with recognition of this in the design of the plaza and streets. On street parking very important to assist with this.
- The retail should not bleed down Sawmill Crescent- should be focused on High Street.
 - Anchor entries should be off High Street to energize this space.
 - Several panel members expressed concern about the livability of townhouses along Marine Way and it was suggested that they might work better as live/work units. However, it was pointed out that live/work units are not a real option due to taxation issues and that townhouses are then the only viable approach to bring life to this frontage. Adding another level with access to the rooftop open space would make them more livable.
 - Parcel 15 tower is in the wrong location casting late afternoon and evening shadow on the square and should be relocated. The shoulders are too tall. The pile theme for ground floor retail works. Parcel 15 tower is kind of mundane.
 - Parcel 17 massing changes to mid-rise and amenity building are good moves. The mid-rise building form is an improvement over the five storey perimeter preliminary form of development.
 - Parcel 17 lower levels are more successful than the tower. The tower is bland and needs to go further - the precedent images are a good reference. Some concern that the wood elements on lower levels are applique
 - The architecture and forms should consider the simplicity of industrial buildings.
 - Strong, innovative, challenging architecture preferred. Parcel 16.1 and 18.1 took up the challenge with the log boom and fish scale references.
 - Parcel 16 and 18 are strong and dynamic architectural expressions that can play off each other.
 - Further consideration should be given to the orientation/outlook of units in Parcel 18.1 and the shielding by the scales.
 - As the loading and parking access is off the lane there was a suggestion of treating the lane more like a pedestrian mews as well;
 - Use the public art plan that is not a faux acknowledgment of the history of the site;
 - A great opportunity to have an architectural expression that is strong and innovative and is engaging.
- **Applicant's Response:** Mr. Jarvis thanked the Panel and said it was great feedback. He said that it would help in building the overall community over the next ten to twenty years. He reminded the Panel of the number of developments that have townhouses fronting arterial roads. He said he heard the Panel's comments regarding getting as much sunlight as possible on the plaza. With respect to Crescent Street, it was always envisioned to have retail spaces and not a residential frontage. He added that they are struggling with getting the commercial on the site and that is why there are office uses in some of the buildings. He said that he agreed with the Panel regarding Public Art and that their strategy is very much in line with the Panel's comments. As well they are dealing with Engineering Services to make the plaza a space for both pedestrians and vehicles.

Ms. Long said they really appreciated the comments.

Adjournment

There being no further business the meeting adjourned at 7:40 p.m.