

Urban Design Panel & Chinatown Historic Area Planning Committee Joint Meeting
March 4, 2015

PRESENT: STAFF
Paul Cheng, Development Planner
Zlatan Jankovic, Heritage Planner
Tom Wanklin, Senior Planner

PRESENT: MEMBERS OF THE URBAN DESIGN PANEL:
Walter Francl, Architect
Joe Fry, Landscape Architect
David Grigg, Engineer
Jennifer Marshall, Architect (Chair)
Arno Matis, Architect
Phil Mondor, Vancouver Planning Commission
Chris Mramor, Landscape Architect
Matthew Soules, Architect

PRESENT: MEMBERS OF THE CHINATOWN HISTORIC AREA PLANNING COMMITTEE:
Matthew Halverson, Dr. Sun Yat-Sen Garden Society Representative
Sherry Han, AIBC Representative
Kenneth Liu, Chinese Benevolent Assoc. Representative
Gair Williamson, Heritage Vancouver Representative
Clinton McDougall, Member at- Large (Chair)

Introduction - members of Staff, the UDP and CHAPC introduced themselves

Purpose of the Workshop:

The purpose of this special joint workshop of the Urban Design Panel (UDP) and the Chinatown Historic Area Planning Committee (CHAPC) are:

- To reflect the concerns and comments we have heard from the community in the previous workshop.
- To seek urban design advice on how new development can strengthen and enhance the architectural character of historic Chinatown.

Workshop Presentations:

- Chinatown Plan Implementation Update - Tom Wanklin, Senior Planner
- Chinatown Building Examples: Past and Present - Paul Cheng, Senior Development Planner

Discussion:

Panel members offered a range of comments including:

- The design guidelines are extremely difficult to ENFORCE and at the end of four years they seem to be a failed experiment;
- Current large development are oversized and are not fitting well with the Chinatown context however the projects that are fitting better are the smaller sites;
- Might not be able to stop developers from assembling property, but the City can stop them from designing a single building on a site;
- There is grain and texture to the old buildings that is important in this area of the city;
- The area should support fabric buildings rather than buildings that dominate an entire block;
- At street level the rhythm of the retail is a singular and strong characteristic of Chinatown;
- Chinatown has huge character, style, colour and embellishments and the historical building's materials are usually a lot of masonry and stone and metal detailing;
- If contemporary materials are going to be used, they need to be used in a sensitive way that relates to the existing context;
- Appropriate building expression needs to be considered for new buildings;

- Consider a FSR cap on the bigger lots to control what can be built;
- Modern interpretations of historical patterns would be supportable;
- It is important that new buildings have verticality and rhythm and a distinction between the bottom, middle, top as well as the parapet or cornice line;
- The base of the historical buildings was often 2-3 storeys of commercial, the middle section was residential and the top floor was dedicated to community (society uses) which led to a certain character on the top floor that often added details such as balconies;
- It seems that in the newer buildings there is not a lot happening at the ground plane which mean the space is usually taken over by banks or drug stores that don't activate the street;
- It was suggested that perhaps developers should earn height and density through adding public spaces such as parks, plazas and other public spaces;
- New buildings need to activate the lane with retail uses or other uses, internal breezeways or devices that will contribute to a new vernacular;
- In Chinatown the retail spills out into the sidewalks which makes the neighbourhood unique;
- Need to put priority on 25 foot lot width increment of development to maintain texture of streetscape. Large developments need to provide an architectural response that addresses this;
- There needs to be some flexibility in height to create some different types of residential and commercial units;
- There are many different ways to design a building that could lead to legibility, visual richness which may be a challenge for the larger sites and it would also be important that they have a 25 foot buildings expression to fit into the historical context;
- It is important to differentiate the new from the old while not mimicking the old;
- Like the idea of taking something that is clearly a defining element and maybe expressing it in an symbolic and abstract or a contemporary way;
- The best design has a close relationship to all the activities that happen in the building;
- Is there really a need for all the parking in the new buildings considering 50% of residents are single persons;
- Life happens out in the neighbourhood and the idea of public space is incredibly important;
- As well, less and less Chinese people are choosing to live in Chinatown so housing needs to be affordable to attract them to the neighbourhood;
- There was some concern on how to make Chinatown more sociably sustainable since there is a lack of community space;
- As well there are other sustainability concerns regarding rain water runoff, contamination from the roofs and back alleys that ends up in the city's water supply.