

URBAN DESIGN PANEL MINUTES

DATE: April 15, 2015

TIME: 4:00 pm

PLACE: Sun Room, Robson Square

PRESENT: MEMBERS OF THE URBAN DESIGN PANEL:
Russell Acton
Stefan Aepli
Meghan Cree-Smith
Stuart Hood
Ken Larsson
Jennifer Marshall
Arno Matis
Chris Mramor
Neil LaMontagne

REGRETS: Matthew Soules
Roger Hughes

**RECORDING
SECRETARY:** Lidia McLeod

ITEMS REVIEWED AT THIS MEETING

1. 800 Robson Street - UBC Robson Square
-

BUSINESS MEETING

Chair Marshall called the meeting to order at 4:00 p.m. and noted the presence of a quorum. There being no New Business the meeting considered applications as scheduled for presentation.

1. Address: 800 Robson Street - UBC Robson Square
DE: 418434
Description: Exterior alterations to add a glass entry at both the north and south entry locations for the University of British Columbia.
Zoning: CD-1
Application Status: Complete Development Application
Review: Third (Workshop)
Architect: Stantec Architecture
Owner: BC Building Corporation
Delegation: Noel Best, Stantec Architecture
Doug Hamming, Stantec Architecture
Andy Schimmel, Province of British Columbia
Gerry McGeough, University of British Columbia
Staff: Anita Molaro

WORKSHOP:

- **Introduction:** Anita Molaro introduced the project as a joint effort between the City of Vancouver, the University of British Columbia (UBC) and the province of British Columbia to provide some identity for UBC in the downtown area. This project has previously been looked at, and the panel had been able to provide good direction but not support for it. Given the importance of Robson Square to everyone it was thought that a workshop would be the best approach to open a dialogue about the execution.
- **Applicant's Introductory Comments:** Doug Hamming, Architect, noted that the larger goal is to realize the site as a significant, vibrant, urban center. The urban design should support goals of education and street presence. Any site evolution should provide connections between the inside and outside of the space, as well as have a good relationship with secondary architectural elements. Doug asked the panel to provide clear commentary on whether the form should be curval or linear, issues of accessibility and the direction in which the project should take.

Noel Best, Architect, laid out several key goals which he hoped to encapsulate within the project. These included issues of access to education facilities, making it easier to find the education space, creating a significant space for coming and going and creating a space which complements UBC's activities. Noel also asked the panel to consider whether the objectives were clear goals requiring solutions, whether UBC had the siting criteria right, and if the panel agreed with the siting analysis.

- **Panel's Consensus on Key Aspects Needing Improvement:**
 - Design needs to be bolder.
 - Design development to emerge from, and be part of and in scale with the existing space qualities.
 - Design development to leverage engagement opportunities along the intervention.
 - Design proposal needs to be a cohesive family of components that respects the original design.
 - Lighting is important and should contribute to the night time ambiance.

- **Related Commentary:** The panel understands and sympathizes with the fact that the current plaza does not allow UBC to have a presence. Although more presence is needed at street level, additional design work is needed in order to address issues of programming and engagement with the plaza.

The current plaza is not very welcoming, and a significant access solution is needed in order to compel people into the lower space. Whatever can be done in order to revitalize the plaza should be done, especially with regards to multi-use programming.

Any proposal should respond to the space by creating a compelling story through the design elements used. The plaza could also be invigorated through activation along the linear edges at street level by incorporating more shops, adding an indoor garden, or opening up the space architecturally. Public realm presence would be enhanced by incorporating better way-finding, or by raising the domes above the street-level as seen in the original proposal for the plaza set forth by Arthur Erickson in 1972. More attractive lighting would also work towards creating safety and a better ambiance to study and hang-out in during the nighttime hours.

Additionally, whatever is proposed needs to be dramatic and complimentary to the existing civic spaces. Robson Square is a civic space and needs a civic component. Any solution should not just be what is best for UBC, but what is best for the public realm.

The panel suggests coming back with a much bolder solution incorporating a family of elements within its design. As there is limited space in the area, this will require a high level of creativity in order to create a good and effective interface.

- **Applicant's Response:** Doug Hamming noted that animating the plaza edges at street level is only part of the story, as no matter what is done at the below-grade plaza level it will not be sufficient to make the space viable. Doug suggested that there could be two stories interacting over top of UBC in order to connect the university space with the street, and address the 'tentativeness' of the current proposal. A café would work well there, but that alone without a civic gesture will fail.

Solutions need to be found within particular locations, and then assessed to see if they meet civic needs. Any building that marks UBC should have street presence, and animate the plaza with its very existence. The ice rink works fantastically, but programming is an issue of demand. UBC can't put on a concert every night, and the problem with creating space for restaurants is that they would be very far from a lane access in order to receive supplies. Demand is a building process that will take years to develop, but in the meantime the public will and does have free use of the space.

Adjournment

There being no further business the meeting adjourned at 6:55 p.m.