

URBAN DESIGN PANEL MINUTES

DATE: June 17, 2015

TIME: 4:00 pm

PLACE: Town Hall Meeting Room, City Hall

PRESENT: MEMBERS OF THE URBAN DESIGN PANEL:
Russell Acton
Stefan Aepli
Stuart Hood (Excused Item #2)
Roger Hughes
Ken Larsson
Jennifer Marshall
Arno Matis
Chris Mramor (Excused Item #2)
Matthew Soules

REGRETS: Meghan Cree-Smith

RECORDING SECRETARY: Lidia McLeod

ITEMS REVIEWED AT THIS MEETING

1. 900 Block West 41st Avenue (Oakridge Transit Centre) Workshop
 2. 555 West Cordova Street (Waterfront Station) Workshop
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BUSINESS MEETING

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

1. Address: 900 Block W 41st Avenue (Oakridge Transit Centre) Workshop
 DE: NA
 Description: Translink proposes to redevelop the Oakridge Transit Centre site (also known as the bus barns) on 41st Avenue near Oak Street. The City of Vancouver is leading a planning process with Translink and the surrounding community to create a Policy Statement to guide future rezoning of the site. This workshop will review the draft planning concepts and guiding principles for this 13.8 acre site, as well as three adjacent sites including the Jewish Community Centre.
 Zoning: Varies
 Application Status: Workshop
 Review: First
 Architect: Perkins & Will (Joyce Drohan)
 Owner: Joyce Drohan, Ben Smith (Translink)
 Delegation: Joyce Drohan, Ben Smith
 Staff: Kirsten Robinson and Patricia St. Michel

WORKSHOP:

- **Introduction:** Kirsten Robinson, Development Planner, introduced the project as a joint effort between the City and Translink to develop a plan for the site. The purpose of the workshop is to get feedback and advice from the panel on the draft concept plan, the approach to form and massing, and the emerging policies to guide future rezoning of the Oakridge Transit Centre (OTC) site.

The OTC site is 13.8 acres and is bound by W 41st Avenue to the south, W 38th Avenue to the north, and two existing residential lanes on either side to the east and west. The site is close in proximity to several schools. There are also several notable large development sites in the area including Oakridge Centre, and the possible future redevelopment of the RCMP Fairmont site. The sites directly to the east are included in the Cambie Corridor plan, the sites that sit on either side are included in the Oakridge/Langara Policy Statement that was approved in 1995, and that allows townhouses and low-rise apartments on either side of the site. There have also been rezoning applications to the west of the site which have been approved within the last few months.

The site was first developed as a bus trolley depot in 1948 which operated until 2006. At that time it was identified as surplus land. The Oakridge/Langara Policy Statement supports densities on the site of 0.8 - 1.0 FSR on the site, which is primarily townhouses and mid-rise buildings. In February 2014, Council, at Translink's request, approved a planning program to create a policy statement for this site.

At the launch open houses in June 2014 there was an illustrated brainstorming session where artists were paired with members of the public to create illustrations of their vision for the future of the site. The analysis of those ideas along with written feedback indicated support for creation of new parks and open space. The public supported a primarily residential neighbourhood with a focus on affordable family housing, and including low to mid-rise buildings with local-serving shops and retail. There is additional interest in a grocery store, and community recreation facilities such as a community or cultural centre. Using that feedback, along with City policies and objectives, seven guiding principles were created which were used to guide the development of three preliminary concept plans.

One of the key drivers of the planning process has been the location and configuration of the park. Park staff are seeking a generally rectangular park to maximize programming flexibility and to accommodate a play field. They were interested in having public streets fronting the park, as well as having exposure to either 41st or 38th Avenue. They also wanted two acres of usable park space which is not impacted by the footprint of the childcare facility.

Each of the concepts presented to the public in February included a 2.2 acre park with a stand-alone childcare facility in it, and retail along the 41st Avenue frontage. There was approximately 1.2 million square feet of development for buildings that range from three to twelve stories, as well as two opportunities for additional height on 41st up to fifteen stories. While the public supported the ideas contained in the three concepts, there was no clear consensus on any one concept, however there were some key ideas which emerged. In general there was support for a more centrally located park with more units fronting onto it, more variety in types of buildings with an emphasis in increasing townhouse units, and a more organic structure with a curved street.

In response to feedback and staff evaluation a new concept that reimagines the curved street has been developed. This concept was inspired by the local Oakridge context where curves are a defining element in the patterning of the neighbourhood. At a high level, this concept includes a curved central street, new pedestrian connections to 39th Avenue, approximately 1.265 million square feet, and more residential units fronting onto the park. It also includes a greater mix of building types including townhouses and mid-rise buildings with two 15-storey buildings at the entrance to the site, and retail along 41st Avenue. The park site was increased to 2.3 acres to reduce the impact of the childcare facility on usable park space.

Through the work on the OTC site three additional sites have been identified for inclusion in the study area. Currently there is a gap in the existing policy and neither the gas station nor the Oakmont Medical building are included in either the Oakridge/Langara Policy Statement or the Cambie Corridor Plan. Future development of the Jewish Community Centre is also being considered in conjunction with planning for the OTC. These are important sites in completing a comprehensive vision for 41st Avenue between Oak Street and Willow Street.

- **Applicant's Introductory Comments:** Joyce Drohan, Architect, commented that it is not often that we are presented with a unique opportunity to consider how a large 13 acre site can contribute to the larger neighbourhood structure. A key interest was in creating a unique structure while balancing the urban design challenge of accommodating a relatively large park and creating a liveable new neighbourhood.

The urban design framework includes a new primary north-south street located a deliberate distance from Oak Street. There is a network of opportunities for walking and cycling both north-south and east-west, on alignment with 39th Avenue, as well as diagonal movements through the site. There was a desire to create a more urban response to the important intersection of Oak and 41st which is currently inactive given surrounding uses of the gas station and senior's home.

Street walls are used to define 41st Ave and the park. To ensure transitions to surrounding townhouses and to reduce shadows on the park, the tallest buildings, up to 15-storeys, are located on 41st Avenue. The site is an opportunity to create a new place within the city with medium density forms, supported by local serving retail and a unique neighbourhood park.

- **Panel's Consensus on Key Aspects Needing Improvement:**
 - The proposal needs to have a much stronger conceptual framework with a coherent response to sustainability (orientation, passive design, solar access), sense of community, and connections to surrounding context (massing, street layout, etc.)
 - The park is an important element and could be the centrepiece of the new development
 - The scale and significance of the curved road system appears irrational and does not seem to create an acceptable development
 - There needs to be more thought given to connection to the community context
 - Consideration should be given to how traffic will flow in and around the site
 - Density and form should be more spread gradually throughout the area
 - Another look is needed at massing on 41st Avenue; the current proposal is too dense
- **Related Commentary:** This project is a unique opportunity to develop an entire precinct. It should set a new standard for sustainability and livability. As designed to date it falls short.

The scale and significance in the overall scheme of the curved route seems irrational in terms of how it relates to the greater context; it does not connect to the street system context. Urban structures should be a component in a larger system. The foreignness and lack of cohesiveness to the urban realm beyond undermines what might be a positive characteristic in itself.

The proposal would be stronger if it was either more straightforward, a rigorous and precise basic block structure, or if it was really distorted somehow to create a special place. Currently the proposal seems caught in a middle ground between these two and is not a *destination*.

Cranking the buildings around to respect the street curvature does not seem to be working from a development perspective. It creates some nasty conditions and doesn't appear to be making an acceptable development.

The park is very predictable - it's just another park and it could contribute so much more to the overall scheme. Even though it is driven by park board requirements it would be nice to see a scheme which utilizes the park space in making something really unique.

Things like site ecology and connection to the community should be thought of. Spaces need to connect in a coherent way which makes sense for the surrounding community, and serious thought should be given to how traffic will flow through and around the site. As well, there seems to be a lack of cohesiveness to the overall public realm which doesn't make for positive city-making.

The form of the project currently seems a bit jarring and could be improved by taking some of the density off of 41st Avenue and redistributing it either towards Oak Street or the interior of the site. The scale transition between the Cambie Corridor and this site is too dramatic, and at the same time Oak Street and West 38th Avenue seem forgotten.

- **Applicant's Response:** The applicant team thanked the panel for their feedback on the concept, and noted that it is a challenge to provide a model at the policy stage because all the details have not been fully resolved. They believe that an orthogonal approach is not the only answer to City building and that there can a rationale for doing otherwise. They also look forward to the next opportunity to discuss the project moving forward.

2. Address:	555 W Cordova Street (Waterfront Station) Workshop
DE:	DE418532
Description:	Workshop to discuss the current concept for the Waterfront Station site.
Zoning:	DD
Application Status:	Workshop
Review:	Second
Architect:	B+H Architects (Bruce Knapp) AS+GG Architecture (Gordon Gill) James K.M. Cheng Architects (James Cheng)
Owner:	Cadillac Fairview Corp Ltd.
Delegation:	Gordon Gill, Adrian Smith + Gordon Gill Architecture Patrick Fejer, B & H Architects Bruce Knapp, B & H Architects James Cheng, James Cheng Architects Chris Phillips, PFS Studio Landscape Architects
Staff:	Sailen Black

WORKSHOP:

- **Introduction:** Sailen Black, Development Planner, introduced the project as being at the north side of Cordova Street in the downtown district. Note-worthy buildings on the site include the Station built in 1914, which connects multiple modes of travel including skytrain lines and the seabus. Other significant developments include the Landing immediately to the east, as well as Harbour Centre and 333 Seymour which are across Cordova. New developments 601 West Hastings and 320 Granville are also in this area, but have only been approved in principle by council. Railway tracks exist to the north of the site and are quite extensive as they remain in ongoing operational use.

This is within the downtown district ODP, which means there is a range of intents for anyone who comes in with applications. There is no outright entitlement to density in the downtown as density is earned. Some things which may affect allowable density include the standard and quality of the development, the amenity that it provides to residents of the downtown and to people whom work and shop there, and the creation of a distinctive public realm including a unique and pleasing streetscape. The density for this site is a conditional maximum of 9.0 FSR, and the basic maximum height is 300 feet. While the site could technically host a building up to 450ft, there is a view-cone for this site which limits this to 417ft.

Transit Hub Context: Anita Molaro, Assistant Director of Planning, introduced the Transit Hub study - a world-class transportation interface between land, sea and air. Much thought has been given on how to connect the area with the city and the lower elevations. This is made more complex given the grade changes between the waterfront and Cordova, as well as the involved landowners which include the Vancouver Whitecaps, Port Metro Vancouver and the federal government. The Sinclair Centre is currently undergoing rezoning, and potential development may be explored in the future by council.

Opportunities for street-end views from Granville, Cordova Connector and Seymour have been recognized, as well as the chance to add a Canada Place extension. The plan is to facilitate bus movements with the Granville connection and to run a streetcar along Cordova. Connecting the seawall into this space would extend it into the City and out across the port-lands, which would create the opportunity to view out over the water.

The proposed Transit Hub structure itself will be a high-density commercial building, with a bright new passenger concourse boasting a range of services and a new ferry terminal. All the transit systems will be connected with links created to serve the waterfront. Additional transit rail capacity will also be created.

The existing Transit Hub (the Station) has internal circulation challenges. The proposal will help to achieve and solve significant urban design issues within the area. The concourse also has the opportunity for retail functions.

It is a challenge to work in parking and road alignments with Canadian Pacific Rail. Conceptually the building heights would come down to the water, opening out the current station and allowing for pathways down. An additional challenge is that the City does not own the land, and requires both cooperation from the landowners and significant funding from other levels of government in order to achieve this plan.

- **Applicant's Introductory Comments:** The applicants noted that there were a lot of comments concerning the public realm at the last meeting, as well the relationship to heritage and the public plaza level. The plaza showcases the heritage buildings and maintains a public space as its driving principle. The hope is to create a collective space and informal gathering area between the buildings. Currently the animated edges encourage those uses.

In order to direct pedestrian movement the spaces need to be linked very well, with a permeable ground floor allowing for movement out towards the water edge and some public viewing terraces. It also will take into account the view cones and end-of-street views.

As previously mentioned several owners have an interest in the development. There is a proposal to relocate the Cordova Connector to give more area to the plaza, with the intent to turn a right-of-way into the plaza while incorporating the future roadway.

- **Panel's Consensus on Key Aspects Needing Improvement:**
 - The juxtaposition of the new and old architecture could be improved
 - It is important to take sculpting seriously; this building should be awesome
 - Attention should be paid to the waterfront/Transit Hub framework and the ability to facilitate pedestrian and vehicular traffic flow
 - Views through the site to the mountains and water are important to maximize
 - Minimizing tower mass is critical, particularly below the cornice lines of heritage buildings, as it frees up views for the man on the street to the mountains
 - Positive connections to the future Transit Hub, waterfront, and Gastown laneway are critical to the success of the building
- **Related Commentary:** Most of the panel felt that the overhanging for the Station would greatly impact this important heritage element, but generally didn't think it was bad to encroach into the airspace above it. However the tower should be minimized at grade.

This is an improvement from the previous submission. It is important that a good plan is created to acknowledge the impact on Gastown. The character and inventiveness of the tower should remain as it is a positive fit with the skyline, but thought needs to be given to being a good neighbor. This may mean pulling back the tower to give space to other things. Porosity is important to the space as it needs to keep traffic moving. It is also important to keep moves simple, especially closer to grade, in order to be respectful of the Station heritage.

The height is acceptable and some thought the building could go a bit taller. On the topic of plate sizes, the panel felt that a smaller plate size would allow greater ability to fit better into this congested site - freeing up more of the view, giving more space to the heritage context etc. The building's development from the ground plane to the cornice of the Landing is really important for exploration of regulation of façade.

The plaza experience seems very positive; it is important to envision the Station as a Transit Hub and picture what it will look like with buses looping in and around it. This might help to create a more public-friendly space.

The sidewalk overhang is supportable and creates a good gateway expression. The panel felt that even more overhang could work, but notes that it is better to have the structure set back to open to the view. The roof on the Station may need some attention.

Eliminating the odd back and side spaces is a good thing, while snuggling the building up against the Station could create an interesting interior space to see existing heritage.

The laneway behind Gastown is of real concern. Traffic congestion from increased parking and loading needs will burden Cambie Street. A future greenway/bike route/pedestrian mews or laneway should be taken into consideration.

- **Applicant's Response:** The applicant team thanked the panel, noted that this process was extremely helpful, and that they liked hearing the commentary.